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**An exploratory study of the  
curriculum in primary school  
nurture groups: from a pupil,  
parent and practitioner  
perspective.**

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**Master of Arts in Education**

**Thesis submitted for the degree  
of Doctor of Education (EdD)**

**The Open University**

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## **Abstract**

Nurture groups were introduced in the late 1960s to support the well-being of selected pupils whose developmental and learning needs could not be met by mainstream provision (Boxall, 2002). Nurture group intervention emphasises that creating opportunities to develop attachment and security can modify some negative early experiences. Previous research has indicated that primary school nurture groups can be successful but research into the specific characteristics including curriculum provision is sparse and requires further investigation. This small scale, qualitative study investigated the impact of the primary nurture group curriculum. Constructivist ontological and critical realist epistemological positions were adopted to gain the perceptions of pupils, parents and staff through face-to-face interviews supported by observations in nurture groups and mainstream classrooms. The analysis of data was based on thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A total of 16 pupils, 10 parents / caregivers and 8 staff members from three primary schools in the North West of England participated in face-to-face interviews. Findings highlight the perceptions and experiences of all participants with common themes identifying increased levels of both pupil and parental confidence, improved pupil concentration and independence that led to a greater desire to learn. Implications for pupils, parents, nurture groups and schools are discussed.

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<b>Glossary</b>	
<b>Boxall Profile</b>	A diagnostic measure norm referenced for pupils between 3 years 4 months and 8 years of age to provide objective data for pupil selection. Section 1 (Developmental Strands) measures progress in pre-school years development. Section 2 (Diagnostic Profile) describes behaviour that may hinder involvement in school. It was revised in 2013 with an electronic version added in 2015.
<b>Boxall Profile for Young People</b>	Introduced in 2010 for secondary schools that is norm referenced for pupils between the ages of 11-14.
<b>Circle Time</b>	A circular discussion forum that involves every pupil and adults to encourage communication and reflection.
<b>The Nurture Group Curriculum</b>	For the current study the definition of the curriculum includes and extends the statutory National Curriculum requirements that are taught within a wider context based on pupil personal development and interests.
<b>Epistemology</b>	Epistemology relates to the theory of knowledge and for research purposes it can relate to the ontological approach as this may impact upon what the researcher can know.
<b>Focus Group</b>	A group form of interview in which there are several participants in addition to the interviewer with an emphasis on a fairly defined topic.
<b>Goodman Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire</b>	A behavioural screening questionnaire for pupils aged 3–16 years for pupils, teachers and / or parents.
<b>Nurture Group</b>	A group based intervention led by two adults that supports up to twelve pupils who have identified social and emotional needs that may have resulted from a lack of early nurturing experiences.
<b>Nurture Group Network (NGN)</b>	The Nurture Group Network is a charitable organisation with a multi-faceted role including a website that provides information regarding courses, events, training, resources and general guidance regarding best practice. They provide certificated three day training.

<b>Ontology</b>	A branch of metaphysics that relates to the nature of being and how research can be represented in reality.
<b>Primary National Curriculum</b>	The National Curriculum for pupils aged 5-11 years was introduced into England, Wales and Northern Ireland as a statutory curriculum for primary and secondary state schools following the Education Reform Act 1988.
<b>Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD)</b>	The term SEBD can define pupils who exhibit disturbing behaviours that results in them not being able to fully interact with others or cope with their own thoughts and emotions.
<b>Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH).</b>	Social emotional and mental health (SEMH) was identified in the Special educational needs and disability (SEND) Code of Practice and appears to have replaced the previous acronyms of Behavioural emotional and social difficulties (BESD) and Social emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD)
<b>Special Educational Needs (SEN)</b>	The term special educational needs (SEN) refers to children who have learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn than most children of the same age.
<b>Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)</b>	The SEND code of Practice replaced the special educational needs (SEN) Code of Practice with changes in terminology.

<b>Abbreviations</b>	
<b>BESD</b>	Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties
<b>BIOS</b>	Behaviour Indicators of Self-esteem Scale
<b>04S</b>	Department of Education and Science
<b>DfCSF</b>	Department for Children, Schools and Families
<b>DfE</b>	Department for Education
<b>DfEE</b>	Department for Education and Employment
<b>ILEA</b>	Inner London Education Authority
<b>KS2</b>	Key Stage 2
<b>LA</b>	Local Authority
<b>NGN</b>	Nurture Group Network
<b>SDQ</b>	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
<b>SEBD</b>	Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
<b>SEBS</b>	Social, Emotional and Behavioural Skills
<b>SEMH</b>	Social Emotional and Mental Health
<b>SEN</b>	Special Educational Needs
<b>SENCo</b>	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator

<b>SEND</b>	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
<b>TA</b>	Teaching Assistant

# **Chapter 1:**

# **Introduction**

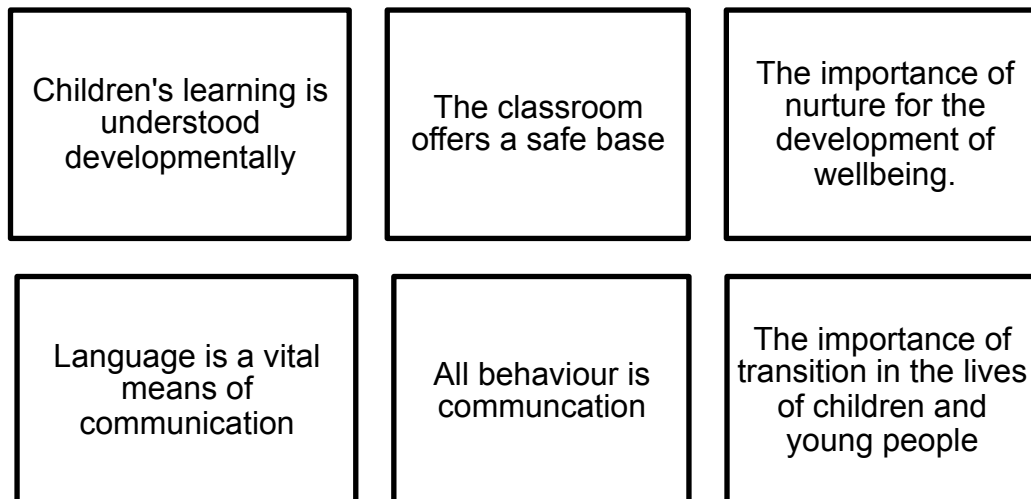


## **1.1 Chapter overview**

This chapter introduces nurture groups through a definition (1.2), background information (1.3), relevant theoretical basis (1.4) and a description of variant models (1.5). This is followed by an outline of how the nurture group curriculum is planned (1.6), a description of the Boxall Profile (1.7), the context of the study (1.8) and how the study relates to pupils with social, emotional and mental health issues (SEMH) (1.9). Finally, the chapter considers the researcher's motivation for the study (1.10), the aim and scope of the study (1.11), the significance of the study (1.12) and a chapter summary (1.13).

## **1.2 What is a nurture group?**

A nurture group is a school based intervention of up to twelve students that aims to replace missing early experiences by developing positive pupil relationships with both teachers and peers in a supportive environment (*About Nurture*, Nurture Group Network, 2017b). Effective nurture group practice follows the six principles of nurture groups (see Figure 1). The primary source of these six principles was provided by Lucas, Insley and Buckland (2006) but a change to the third principle resulted in an updated version used as the definite version throughout the study (Nurture Group Network, 2017a).



**Figure 1: Nurture group principles (Nurture Group Network, 2017a)**

### **1.3 Background information to nurture groups**

There are over 1500 nurture groups in the United Kingdom (UK) (Nurture Group Network, 2017a). Nurture groups originated in the late 1960s in a London borough undergoing social upheaval through local resettlement and an influx of multicultural migrant families resulting in high rates of pupil exclusions and unprecedented rates of referrals for support to the psychological services that related to pupil violence and classroom disruption (Boxall, 2002). It appeared that a high number of these referrals related to pupils whose nurturing care in their earliest years was impaired due to 'unmanageable stress... inadequate parenting... and a discontinuity of experiences between home and school' (Boxall, 2002, p.2).

The problems these pupils faced appeared to be based on a lack of early nurturing that led to difficulties in building relationships with adults and showing appropriate responses to peers (Boxall, 2002). These early groups were based on two underlying principles namely responding to each child at

their developmental age and the quality of early relationships (Bennathan and Boxall, 1996).

#### **1.4 Theoretical basis of nurture groups**

Early nurture groups were influenced by attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), which comments that attachments formed in childhood are essential in the development of learning and thinking. Bowlby (1969) commented that a baby's biological instincts lead them to seek closeness with their parent when requiring basic needs for survival using their relationship with the parent as a secure base. Bombèr, 2007 suggests that if a child's needs are met on a consistent basis, then the child develops a secure attachment to his or her parent through the internalisation of this secure base. This secure attachment would then result in the child having 'the confidence to tolerate separation from their parent' (Bombèr, 2007, p.20) that may increase their capacity to learn new things and build new relationships.

The first principle of nurture groups emphasises the importance that learning is understood developmentally (Nurture Group Network, 2017a) allowing staff to respond to whatever developmental age or stage children had reached and not according to the norms of their chronological age. Kourmoulaki (2013) identified that according to existing research, most nurture groups share a common set of characteristics: two adults, a teacher and teaching assistant (TA), whose presence aims to develop supportive and caring relationships (Colley, 2009) and model positive behaviours and interactions through 'co-operating, sharing, discussing and being consistent' (Sanders, 2007, p.12).

The psychological understanding of nurture groups is based on a socio-cultural theory based on gaining new knowledge and skills supported by social interaction (Vygotsky, 1962). The main emphasis of this socio-cultural theory is how knowledge can be developed through social interaction and that more knowledgeable peers and / or adults can support a child to progress towards their potential ability that Vygotsky (1962) defined as their zone of proximal development (ZPD). In addition, Vygotsky's theory (1962) emphasised the importance of language and social interactions as being fundamental in children's cognitive development that can be influenced by the child's environmental experiences.

Maslow (1943) described a hierarchy whereby if basic physiological needs were met it could lead to improved self-esteem and self-actualisation. There are clear links with Maslow's hierarchy (Maslow, 1943) to the six principles of nurture groups (Nurture Group Network, 2017a) as nurture groups can provide basic physiological needs that link with the foundation stage of Maslow's model. However, although documentation relating to the setting up of early nurture groups makes no reference to Maslow's research, several authors have cited Maslow's hierarchy (Maslow, 1943) in relation to nurture groups (Cooper, Arnold & Boyd, 2001; Cooper & Whitebread, 2007).

### **1.5 Variant models of nurture groups**

Early nurture groups had only one model that is now referred to as the classic model where pupils attended the provision for ninety per cent of the school week (Boxall, 2002). Selection of pupils was from the mainstream school in

which the nurture group was based and in order to retain a link to mainstream provision all nurture group pupils remained on the mainstream roll. This model was too costly for some schools so they adopted less costly models that led to a range of variant models as defined below.

- Variant one groups follow the 'classic' model (Boxall, 2002) based within the mainstream school and usually run for nine half days a week;
- Variant two groups follow the same principles as variant one groups but the amount of time pupils attend is reduced; they can also serve a cluster of schools;
- Variant three groups do not follow the principles of variant one and variant two group; they include lunchtime, after-school groups or break-time groups; and
- Variant four groups may claim to be nurture groups but they are based on containment.

*(Cooper and Whitebread, 2007)*

## **1.6 Planning the nurture group curriculum**

The fundamental premise within nurture groups is that social and emotional needs of individual pupils are addressed through a modified curriculum based on their developmental age and identified social and emotional needs rather than their chronological age (Boxall, 2002). Although the National Curriculum (DfE, 2014a) is a statutory requirement, some children are unable to access the National Curriculum appropriate for their chronological age. As a result, this could discourage pupils from further effort that may result in them becoming frustrated and demoralised leading to challenging or withdrawn

behaviour (Sonnet, 2010). Regular consultation with mainstream staff should ensure that full National Curriculum coverage is met without overlap.

Sonnet (2010) describes a modified primary curriculum, for some vulnerable and needy pupils who struggle at school that includes an emphasis on developing personal, social and emotional skills expressing concerns that many children are under immense pressure from the policy driven demands of their schools and a primary curriculum that is too rigidly prescribed and too narrow. When describing the modified curriculum, Sonnet (2010), goes beyond the taught elements of the curriculum to emphasise the importance of routines and well-defined boundaries that create a secure environment. The nurture group timetable ensures a clear and predictable daily routine that usually includes breakfast, Circle Time (Mosley, 2003), snack time and a range of practical curriculum activities including play based activities.

The Nurture Group Network (NGN) offers guidance in planning a relevant curriculum. Variant one and variant two groups (see section 1.5) are led by two adults, who can model and scaffold curriculum tasks, according to the developmental needs of each pupil (Boxall, 2002). The nurture group environment is conducive to effective curriculum planning by including a kitchen area, a learning area that may also be the dining table, a dressing up corner with the range of activities that may be seen in a typical Early Years setting (Boxall, 2002).

## **1.7 The Boxall Profile**

The Boxall Profile is a diagnostic guide for practitioners to help identify pupils who may require specific nurture group intervention. The Boxall Profile was first published in 1998 (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998) and revised in 2013 with an online version made available in 2015. The purpose of the Boxall Profile is to identify specific areas of social and emotional needs and how they link to cognitive processes. Work on the profile began in 1972 based on the characteristics observed in the nurture groups that reflected behaviour seen in typically developing children in the pre-nursery years through observations and discussions.

The Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998) is a normative indicator of children's emotional, social and behavioural functioning divided in two parts namely Developmental Strands and Diagnostic Profile. The Developmental Strands are based on pupil development including features that would be normal in a baby, a toddler and successful participation at the earliest stage of school life. The Diagnostic Profile is based on inappropriate behaviours in mainstream provision that interfered with the learning of the child concerned with an impact of the learning of other pupils in the class.

The profile was standardised in 1984 by collecting data from 880 pupils in the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) from pupils aged 3 years 4 months to 8 years of age. The children for whom the profile was designed were typically from severely depriving backgrounds and exhibited complex personality, learning and behavioural issues (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998).

The Boxall Profile for Young People was introduced in 2010 for pupils aged 11-14 (Bennathan, Boxall and Colley, 2010) that may be more relevant for older pupils in the primary school phase.

### **1.8 Context of the study**

There has been an increased level of interest in nurture group provision that appears to be as a result of rising number SEBD pupils and associated mental health problems (Colley, 2009). Since publication of Colley's research, the special educational needs and disability (SEND) Code of Practice (DfE, 2014b) has combined these terms as social emotional and mental health (SEMH).

YOUNGMINDS (2017) estimate that SEBD (now SEMH) pupils represent 10 to 20 per cent of all pupils in the 4-16 age range and evidence suggests that SEBD issues in schools continue to rise. The Mental Health Foundation (2017) identify that mental health problems affect about ten percent of children and young people that relate to anxiety, depression and behavioural issues. UNICEF research (*For every child in danger*; UNICEF, 2017) shows that behavioural problems and levels of children's stress are both increasing in the UK. This re-enforces the need to investigate alternative strategies such as the nurture group curriculum as a form of early intervention that may help to prevent mental health issues beyond primary schooling. For primary aged pupils, especially those with SEMH needs, there has been the added pressures of standard assessment tests and related league tables alongside varying interpretations of inclusive education since the earliest nurture groups



were set up. As a result, some primary aged SEMH pupils may require a different approach to early intervention that could reduce interventions to address mental health issues in secondary schools, adolescence and adulthood.

A key area for discussion relates to pupil exclusions based on the origins of nurture groups in the 1960s that identified a high and increasing rate of pupil exclusions that needed to be prevented and reduced (Boxall, 2002). Pupil exclusion needs to be reduced to minimal levels as it may have a worrying impact on pupils that may result in increased levels of funding to deal with subsequent issues (Cole, 2015). Exclusion from school can be identified as a mental health issue (Parker and Ford, 2013) but it could also be identified as a social issue, a political issue or an educational issue (Cole, 2015).

In relation to pupil exclusion rates, although permanent exclusions in primary schools remain low in comparison to secondary schools, there has been a significant rise in the primary sector from 1997/98 to 2011/12 with numbers rising by 13.9 per cent (DfE, 2013) although this has stabilised in recent years (DfE, 2016). SEN pupils are eight times more likely to be permanently excluded than peers without SEN with persistent disruptive behaviour in mainstream classroom accounting for one third of permanent exclusions (DfE, 2016). The number of fixed period exclusions in state funded primary schools increased from 45,010 in 2013/14 to 49,650 in 2014/15 (DfE, 2016). Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) accounted for fifty per cent of all exclusions. Boxall (2002) recommended that pupils attending the earliest

nurture groups should not have a SEN statement as it was felt there might be alternative and more appropriate forms of support available.

### **1.9 How do nurture groups relate to SEBD pupils?**

A key aim of nurture groups is to support SEBD (now SEMH) pupils who may be at risk of failure (Bennathan and Boxall, 1996). Although there are a number of definitions of SEBD this study will use the descriptors to advise schools of broad areas of need in the revised SEN Code of Practice:

- Difficulties in communicating and interacting with others;
- Promoting academic progress in line with peers;
- Evidence of mental health issues and related social and emotional problems; and
- Support needed with physical problems.

*(DfE, 2014b)*

Although primarily this definition relates to mainstream classrooms, it provides clear boundaries for this study as the descriptors of the revised SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2014b) relate to the characteristics identified in the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998).

Recent analysis of data by the NGN has provided useful information relating to SEBD difficulties, characteristics and gender differences with possible stressors. The online version of the Boxall Profile established in 2015 enabled the NGN to provide a nurture portrait of pupils' social, emotional and

behavioural difficulties (Ruby and Scott Loinaz, 2016). This nurture portrait was based on anonymous data gathered in the UK from 3086 children aged three to ten years of age and 1629 young people aged eleven to eighteen years of age who during 2015 and 2016 were identified as needing support with SEBD. The data showed that of those pupils with a completed Boxall Profile, 71 per cent were boys and 29 per cent were girls within an age range of eighteen years to below five years of age. The majority (55 percent) of online Boxall Profiles completed were for primary aged pupils with pupils aged up to five years accounting for 11 per cent of the final total and secondary aged pupils accounting for 34 per cent of the total. The study identified that 80 per cent of primary aged had social and emotional problems with 89 per cent of these pupils having high levels of identified challenging behaviour.

The NGN conducted a study in 2015 based on data collected in the academic year 2014/2015 from 85 nurture groups in the UK that assessed SEBD characteristics in order to identify stressors commonly experienced by nurture group pupils. Common social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties from the above study are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: SEBD characteristics identified by NGN research, 2015**

<b>SEBD Characteristics</b>	<b>%</b>
Aggression	42%
Unco-operative behaviour	26%
Distracted or disengaged	24%
Lacking self-worth	24%
Withdrawn	21%
Running away/leaving classroom	15%

This research identified the most common stressors in SEBD pupils undergoing nurture group provision as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Common stressors relating to SEBD characteristics as identified by NGN research, 2015**

<b>Common stressors identified</b>	<b>%</b>
Witnessed substance abuse	29%
Parent/guardian suffering/suffered from mental illness	28%
Parents recently separated	18%
Sporadic contact with one parent	15%
Witnessed domestic violence	15%
Suffered neglect or abuse	14%
No permanent residence	12%
Parent in prison	8%
Death of parent/guardian	8%

These identified common stressors could underpin the identified characteristics of SEBD as defined on page 11 by the revised SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2014b) that is worthy of further research.

### **1.10 Motivation for the study**

The first area of motivation is based on a personal interest in nurture groups and specifically the nurture group curriculum that began during my role as head teacher of a primary school that was not coping with the high numbers of SEBD pupils on roll who were failing to make academic progress. Many of these pupils were not thriving in mainstream provision so an alternative provision was sought. This alternative provision was to set up a nurture group that was funded by the local authority (LA) as a pilot scheme. As a head teacher, I had a particular interest in planning a creative approach to the curriculum based on the environment of the school and the interests of the pupils so I became very curious as to what the nurture group curriculum could offer to SEBD pupils and how it may differ from mainstream provision.

In a later role as a consultant with the same LA, part of my brief was to support nurture group staff in planning a relevant curriculum that many staff found challenging. The recommended approach to planning the nurture group curriculum is to incorporate the relevant statutory primary National Curriculum requirements, the interests of the individual pupils in the group and the identified social and emotional targets for each of the pupils in the group (Boxall, 2002; Lucas, Insley and Buckland, 2006). Nurture group teachers were unfamiliar with planning a flexible child-centred curriculum as opposed to

a prescribed curriculum based on specific statutory National Curriculum requirements for chronological year groups and for many teaching assistants planning the curriculum was a new experience as previously they were not included in the planning process. These challenges proved to be an ideal starting point for this investigatory research.

A second area of motivation is based on a lack of research to date that identifies the reasons why primary nurture groups appear to be effective in supporting pupils with SEMH, resulting in insufficient research to help practitioners develop their practice, the benefits of which could be transferred to pupils in nurture groups and their parents. The majority of research into nurture group provision discusses their effectiveness with little discussion relating to characteristics that could make them effective. Hughes and Schlösser (2014) reviewed thirteen nurture group studies, eleven of which studied the effectiveness of nurture groups based on data that included the Boxall Profile; the other two studies evaluated styles of communication and praise. Wide ranging evidence based on measured SEBD outcomes suggests that primary nurture groups offer positive support to primary aged SEBD pupils (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007; Reynolds, MacKay and Kearney, 2009; Seth-Smith et al., 2010; Sloan et al., 2016). Also, some of the principles of planning the nurture group curriculum identified in this research may be transferrable to mainstream provision to support those pupils who have identified SEMH needs who have been unable to access nurture group or other forms of specialist provision.

The current study places a high emphasis on consulting pupils, their parents and school staff to obtain their perspectives on the nurture group curriculum. There is little research among published work on nurture groups that include the 'pupil voice' and no research explored children's perspectives on a specific aspect of nurture group provision that may contribute to its success, as existing studies relate to general perceptions, effectiveness and parental involvement. Also, there appears to be few studies that have taken account of parents' views and consultation with nurture group staff.

### **1.11 The aim and scope of the study**

The aim of the current study was to consider the viewpoint and perceptions of current pupils attending nurture group provision, parents / caregivers, nurture group and mainstream staff with a specific focus on the primary nurture group curriculum. Limits to the research are noted from the start. It may be difficult to fully replicate the study as the findings are based on the specific nature of the nurture groups included in the study. These specific factors are the length of time the nurture groups have been running, the amount of time the school spent in familiarising parents and staff with the principles of nurture group provision and the geographical location of the nurture groups. Also, the chosen method of transcribing the data for numerous face-to-face interviews and observations may not be appropriate for other researchers who may choose a different and less time consuming approach to obtaining their data. This will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Five.

### **1.12 The significance of the study**

The current research is significant because it will add to the existing body of knowledge that relates to primary nurture groups, identify reasons as to why nurture groups appear to be effective in supporting SEMH pupils and make a major contribution to the very limited amount of literature that discusses how practitioners may improve their practice to the benefit of both pupils and parents. Previous studies have taken little account of the views of pupils, parents and staff in relation to a specific aspect of nurture group provision and that there has been a paucity of research that has listened to the “”.

### **1.13 Chapter summary**

This chapter defined nurture groups and gave background information relating to their early inception and development by Marjorie Boxall from the 1960s with a discussion relating to the relevant theoretical basis that included attachment theory and socio-cultural theory. The variant models of nurture group provision relevant to the current study were defined with a brief description of both the use and development of the Boxall Profile. Key areas in this chapter related to the planning of the nurture group curriculum and how its modification relates to the mainstream curriculum, the context of the study and how nurture groups relate to SEBD pupils with reference to recent research. This chapter also considered the researcher’s personal motivation for the study based on previous roles and experiences alongside the importance of consulting pupils, their parents and staff to gain their perceptions of the primary nurture group curriculum. Finally, the significance



of the study was discussed in relation to how it will make a major contribution to the existing body of existing research.

# **Chapter 2:**

# **Literature Review**

## **2.1 Chapter overview**

The first section of this chapter defines the literature search (2.2) with an analysis and critique of relevant identified research based on the nurture group curriculum (2.2.1), pupil perceptions (2.2.2), parental perceptions (2.2.3) and staff perceptions (2.2.4). This is followed by the curriculum interventions (2.3) that include sections relating to the social and emotional aspects of learning initiative (2.3.1), play (2.3.2) and language and communication (2.3.3). Finally attachment theory (2.4), links to neuroscience (2.5) and scaffolding (2.6) are discussed followed by a debate relating to whether nurture groups are inclusive or exclusive practice (2.7), the research questions (2.8) and a chapter summary (2.9).

## **2.2 Literature search**

A final systematic literature search using the Open University electronic library services, which included 'ERIC' (1960 to date) and EBSCO was completed in January 2017. In addition, searches were completed during the same period using Google Scholar to find any additional relevant literature.

The search term 'nurture group\*' (\* indicates truncation) refers to a specific intervention that is not referred to by any other name therefore it seemed inappropriate to add additional search terms. Relevant articles were hand searched for additional appropriate literature.

Selection of studies was based on the following inclusion criteria:

- Nurture group intervention was based on variant 1 or variant 2 groups (see section 1.5 for definitions of variant groups);
- Children's and / or parents' and / or staff views were sought and reported; and
- The nurture groups were set up within UK mainstream schools.

As a result of the literature search based on the above inclusion criteria, sixteen relevant articles were identified as shown in Table 3. These will be critiqued under four relevant headings: nurture group curriculum, pupil perceptions, parental perceptions and staff perceptions.

**Table 3: Studies included in literature search**

Sloan, S., Winter, K., Lynn, F., Aiden, G. and Connelly, P. (2016). The impact and cost effectiveness of Nurture Groups in Primary Schools in Northern Ireland. Belfast, Centre for Evidence and Social Intervention, Queen's University, Belfast.
Griffiths, R., Stenner, R. and Hicks, U. (2014). 'Hearing the unheard: Children's constructions of their Nurture Group experiences', <i>Emotional and Child Psychology</i> , 31(1), 124-136.
Syrnyk, C. (2014), 'Capturing the Nurturing approach; experiences of young people with SEMH', <i>Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties</i> , 19 (2), 154-175.
Shaver, I. and McClatchey, K. (2013). 'Assessing Effectiveness of nurture groups in Northern Scotland'. <i>British Journal of Learning Support</i> , 28 (3), 97-102.
Kourmoulaki, A. (2013). 'Nurture groups in a Scottish secondary school: Purpose, features, value and areas for development'. <i>Emotional &amp; Behavioural Difficulties</i> , 18 (1), 60-76.
Garner, J. and Thomas, M. (2011). 'The role and contribution of Nurture Groups in secondary schools: perceptions of children, parents and staff'. <i>Emotional &amp; Behavioural Difficulties</i> , 16 (2), 207-224.
Taylor, V. M. and Gulliford, A. (2011). 'Parental perspectives on nurture groups: the potential for engagement'. <i>British Journal of Special Education</i> , 38(2), 73- 82
Scott, K. and Lee, A. (2009). 'Beyond the "classic" nurture group model: an evaluation of part-time and cross-age nurture groups in a Scottish local authority'. <i>Support for Learning</i> , 24 (1) 5-10.
Binnie, L. M. and Allen, K. (2008). 'Whole school support for vulnerable children: the evaluation of a part-time nurture group'. <i>Emotional &amp; Behavioural Difficulties</i> , 13(3), 201-216.
Cooper, P. and Whitebread, D. (2007). The effectiveness of nurture groups on student progress: evidence from a national research study,

Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, 12(3), 171–191.
Sanders, T. (2007). 'Helping Children Thrive at School: The Effectiveness of Nurture Groups', <i>Educational Psychology in Practice</i> , 23(1), 45-61
Cooper, P. and Tiknaz, Y. (2005). 'Progress and challenge in Nurture Groups: Evidence from three case studies'. <i>British Journal of Special Education</i> , 32 (4), 211–221.
Cooper, P., Arnold, R., and Boyd, E. (2001). 'The effectiveness of Nurture Groups: preliminary research findings'. <i>British Journal of Special Education</i> , 28(4), 160.
Bishop, A. and Swain, J. (2000a). 'The bread, the jam and some coffee in the morning: Perceptions of a nurture group'. <i>Emotional &amp; Behavioural Difficulties</i> , 5(3), 18-24.
Bishop, A. and Swain, J. (2000b). 'Early Years education and children with behavioural and emotional difficulties: nurturing parental involvement?'. <i>Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties</i> , 5(4), 26-31.
Cooper, P. and Lovey, J. (1999). 'Early Intervention in emotional and behavioural difficulties: the role of Nurture Groups'. <i>European Journal of Special Needs Education</i> , 14(2), 122-131.

### 2.2.1 Nurture group curriculum

Although there is no existing research that solely explores the nurture group curriculum, this section provides a critical analysis of six identified studies that include specific references to the nurture group curriculum within their findings: Cooper, Arnold and Boyd, 2001; Kourmoulaki, 2013; Shaver and McClatchey, 2013; Griffiths, Stenner and Hicks, 2014; Syrnyk, 2014; and Sloan et al., 2016).

A recent and highly significant large scale study by Sloan et al. (2016) was commissioned by the Northern Ireland Department of Education and

evaluated by Queen's University, Belfast. The study evaluated the impact and value of primary aged nurture groups in Northern Ireland. There were four stages to the evaluation:

- Quantitative data analysis of pupil progress;
- Quasi-experimental trial with a comparison of pupil progress against schools without nurture groups;
- An analysis of value for money; and
- Qualitative data based on interviews with pupils, parents and staff including observations of nurture groups.

*(Sloan et al., 2016)*

In general, the report appears comprehensive. Although the importance of a child centred focus was raised in the qualitative section of the report, the main disadvantage and disappointing aspect of the report from the researcher's perspective was that pupil responses accounted for less than two per cent of the total number of participant transcripts and these pupil responses are quoted after those by principals, staff and parents as replicated by Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001). The qualitative data in stage four of the research was most relevant to the current research as a key message that emerged from the findings was that skill development could enable pupils' further engagement with the curriculum thus empowering them to reach their potential.

Nurture group staff identified the importance of careful curriculum planning based on an environment that was conducive to learning ensuring the

activities were structured, predictable and safe as identified by Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001). Nurture group staff built in sufficient time for liaison with mainstream staff ensuring that the curriculum planning in the nurture group supported mainstream class activities. Curriculum planning appeared to focus on two particular areas namely developing social skills and addressing identified low levels of pupil self-esteem through food related activities, as discussed by Kourmoulaki (2013), Shaver and McClatchy (2013) and Syrnyk (2014) where pupils were given responsibility for particular tasks during snack time.

The data from pupil interviews identified that the nurture group curriculum was more enjoyable than the mainstream classroom emphasising their particular enjoyment of play based activities. Shaver and McClatchy (2013) also emphasised the engaging nature of the nurture group curriculum with the importance of play related activities also being also cited by Shaver and McClatchy (2013) and Syrnyk (2014). Pupils commented that greater opportunities to play in the nurture group had resulted in the opportunity for them to develop new friendships. Some pupils reported that they felt more involved in their learning that may have had an impact on their behaviour with particular emphasis on increased confidence with fewer incidents of aggressive behaviour. Pupils commented that since they joined the nurture group they felt more involved in their learning with positive outcomes such as improved concentration and a desire to work harder.



Kourmoulaki (2013) obtained the views of pupils, parents and staff in an exploratory study of two nurture groups in a Scottish secondary school. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with twelve current and four former pupils from both nurture groups, six parents of both current and former nurture group pupil, four nurture group staff and a range of other mainstream staff. Only one interview with parents was face-to-face with the other five being telephone interviews. The main disadvantage of telephone interviews is that it is very difficult to develop a rapport with participants that may reduce the validity of perceptions as opposed to face-to-face interviews. Also, there were limitations to this research as firstly it would be difficult to replicate as it was based on a single organisation and secondly there were no clear selection criteria for participants with little justification of using individual, paired and group participant interviews.

In relation to the nurture group curriculum, the findings based on pupil and nurture group staff data indicated that the learning in the nurture group was fun supported by Shaver and McClatchy (2013). Relevant experiences identified by the research were preparing breakfast, group discussions, art activities, social skills games and role-play. The role-play was built into curriculum activities to allow pupils to take responsibility and give them the opportunity to practise interpersonal skills in peer related activities. Literacy and numeracy were gradually introduced to the group through a range of practical activities to promote life skills that included writing invitations to events and selling their creations at charity fairs. Homework provision was identified as an area of parental concern based on parental learning

difficulties. One parent expressed frustration that they wanted to support their child with their geography and history homework but was unable support through their identified poor subject knowledge that was blamed on the deficits of their own education.

Shaver and McClatchy (2013) assessed the effectiveness of nurture groups through a mixed method study using questionnaires, focus groups, standardised measures based on the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998) and a semi-structured interview. However, there were some limitations to this research as there was no indication why focus groups was the chosen method of interviewing pupils and there was no justification for the relevance of the icebreaker task. Also, although a triangulated approach was apparent through the identified methodology, the authors do not discuss how a pupil questionnaire can add to the data obtained through the pupil interviews. Another limitation of this research was that there was no identified control group that could help isolate the nurture group effects from general improvements over time. The findings identified successes of nurture group provision based on the views of the pupils, some of which related to the nurture group curriculum. These findings supporting research by Kourmoulaki (2013), Syrnyk (2014) and Sloan et al., (2016) and identified that pupils particularly enjoyed food related activities to promote the development of social skills through cooking, breakfast, snack time and tasks that included washing dishes. Other areas that supported the research by Sloan et al. (2016) were the pupils' reference to play, the use of toys and indications they were able to social and develop new friendships.

Griffiths, Stenner and Hicks (2014) carried out research on children's nurture group experiences in one Welsh onsite nurture group based on the "" model (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007). The participants were eight key stage two (KS2) pupils, six of whom attended the current provision and two who had reintegrated into mainstream provision. A focus group methodology was employed using a Circle Time (Mosley, 2003) format with ice-breaking activities and a variety of recording methods to ensure the needs of vulnerable pupils were met in order to maximise their participation and provide a context where they felt comfortable and empowered to share their views. Although this article is dated 2014 it places heavy reliance on research prior to 2010 and cites only two examples, dated 2000 and 2001, of identified literature that makes reference to pupils' viewpoints. Supporting earlier research by Kourmoulaki (2013), the findings indicated that sharing breakfast appeared to be an important feature identified by pupils. In regard to learning, the pupil responses identified the importance of scaffolding by the two adults to support pupils in completing curriculum tasks.

Syrnyk (2014) captured the experiences of young pupils with SEBD in an acclimatisation programme to nurture approaches that operated as a collection of seven primary nurture groups with an average class size of eight pupils supported by seven class teachers and twenty two teaching assistants. All participating pupils were male with an SEN statement who had been excluded from at least one other school. The method of the research was based on the pupil participants drawing pictures of their educational experiences followed by semi-structured interviews. However, this study

would be very difficult to replicate due to the very specific nature of the provision. In addition, the data analysis of the pupils' drawings appears very complex and subjective through the use of adapted versions of the evaluation processes, particularly as the adaptations were not made apparent. There was high emphasis on the data from the drawings that formed about 88 per cent of the findings as the remaining 12 per cent was based on the interviews. Also, it was not fully evident how many pupils took part in the interviews but there were responses from five pupils cited in the findings but there were no criteria given as to how these pupils were chosen. The findings based on the pupil interviews identified a number of positive areas that included play based activities, mathematics, breakfast time and the positive support of their teachers. The most positive response from pupils was in regard to play based activities that included outdoor play, playing with toys and an element of free choice where pupils were allowed to choose their own activity after completion of allotted curriculum activity.

Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001) investigated nurture group effectiveness through a large-scale longitudinal study. The sample involved 342 pupils receiving nurture group provision with matched controls in mainstream classrooms with similar levels of SEBD and matched controls without SEBD. The authors emphasised the diversity of the samples that were taken from 23 primary and 2 secondary schools across 8 counties. Pupil progress was measured through the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998), the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1997), teacher perceptions and National Curriculum data. Pupil perceptions were gained

through face-to-face interviews and parental perceptions accessed through semi-structured telephone interviews. Therefore, the main disadvantage of telephone interviews, as identified in earlier research by Kourmoulaki, 2013) is that it is very difficult to develop a rapport with participants that may reduce the validity of perceptions as opposed to face-to-face interviews. Pupils' responses in relation to the curriculum indicated that they particularly enjoyed the food-based and play-based activities and welcomed the freedom of choice they were offered. In addition, they commented positively on the predictable routine and the support from nurture group staff. This replicates earlier research by Kourmoulaki (2013), Shaver and McClatchey (2013) and Syrnyk (2014). It was interesting that in relation to presenting the findings this study firstly discussed the impact on mainstream schools (based on staff perceptions) followed by parents' perceptions and finally children's perceptions. Therefore it appears that children's perceptions are considered subsidiary to the perceptions of both staff and parents.

### **2.2.2 Pupil perceptions**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) has raised the profile of children's participation in the UK (*For Every Child in Danger*; UNICEF, 2017). In particular, this relates to Articles 12 and 13 of the Convention that discuss the right of every child to freely express their thoughts and opinions and to have their views and feelings considered and taken seriously. Hart's ladder of participation has been an influential model in this field (Hart, 1992) that is based on five levels of participation based on listening to children, taking their views into account and involving children in

the decision making process. The origin of 'pupil voice' is difficult to define but it has been widely used in educational literature where pupils are asked to comment on school issues (Arnot et al., 2004) and offer pupils an opportunity for active participation in the decision-making process (Flutter, 2007).

As discussed earlier in section 2.2.1 Kourmoulaki (2013), Griffiths, Stenner and Hicks (2014) and Syrnyk (2014) also made specific reference to pupil interviews in their findings. Syrnyk (2014) carried out research that captured the experiences of pupils with SEBD in nurture group provision. The method of the research was based on the pupil participants drawing pictures of their educational experiences followed by semi-structured interviews. The findings showed that pupils were generally positive about their nurture group experiences, which they identified as being different to mainstream provision. Contrary to the findings by Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001), the pupils appeared comfortable during the interview process. Kourmoulaki (2013) identified five key categories based on pupil consultation into the value of the provision namely feelings of safety, readiness for school, anti-bullying strategies, belonging and social communication skills. Following consultation with pupils, Griffiths, Stenner and Hicks (2014) identified four key themes namely the importance of a familiar and welcoming environment, building relationships, factors that contribute towards learning and self-regulatory behaviour.

Sanders (2007) evaluated the effectiveness of a pilot project in Hampshire to measure pupil progress over three terms based on quantitative data using the

Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998) and qualitative data based on interviews with pupils, parents, nurture group staff and head teachers. In addition, questionnaires were given to learning support assistants (LSAs) and teachers with observations carried out in the nurture groups over the three terms. A control group compared progress based on the Boxall Profile data (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998). The author identified a number of limitations of the research that included the positive gains identified by the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998) when compared to the control group. Although the control group was matched based on a number of criteria it had higher entry level scores on the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998) than the experimental group thereby limiting the effectiveness of the comparison.

Sanders (2007) interviewed seven pupils individually who were selected according to severity of need through an analysis of the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998). This raises concerns regarding the validity of the data as the primary aged pupils interviewed individually may have been stressed and uncomfortable, thereby not responding in a true manner. Also, representational sampling techniques can be questioned as the chosen pupils were chosen based on the severity of identified SEBD need. Data from pupil interviews identified that they generally enjoyed school more, had increased their circle of friends and had improved the concept of themselves as learners. Building positive relationships was also identified in earlier studies (Griffiths, Stenner and Hicks, 2014 and Kourmoulaki, 2013).

Research by Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001) that was previously discussed in section 2.2.1 identified positive issues related to the environment, building peer relationships and relationships with staff. The pupils enjoyed the calm atmosphere the nurture group room provided in addition to building strong interpersonal relationships with peers and staff. The authors state that these positive comments by pupils in relation to nurture group provision contrasted with the negative opinions expressed by the same pupils that related to mainstream experiences. This was supported by the findings of the studies by Sanders (2007), Griffiths, Stenner and Hicks (2014) and Kourmoulaki, (2013).

### **2.2.3 Parental perceptions**

Parental power or voice is an area to address and develop (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; DCSF, 2009). The importance of parental involvement and consultation has been highlighted by the Plowden report (DES, 1967), Warnock (2006) and a DfES publication (DfES, 2007). Most of the identified research has not focussed specifically on parental perspectives but has included the views of parents. This section gives a critical analysis of identified studies that include references to parental perceptions within their findings.

Bishop and Swain (2000a) carried out a small-scale study based on semi-structured interviews in a classic model (Boxall, 2002) nurture group at an inner city primary school. The research was completed at the request of the head teacher after the nurture group closed. There appears to be a number of concerns regarding the validity of the research regarding the selection of participants. Firstly, participants were selected using quota sampling, being



drawn from the main groups directly involved without any identified sampling procedures and secondly purposive sampling was employed as participants were chosen on their perceived ability to give informed opinions about the nurture groups. In addition, the views of the participants interviewed were all retrospective. Also, as this research was based on one primary school with a nurture group that was closing due to a lack of funding, there could be an element of bias from the choice of school-based participants and some of the questions to participants could have been more open ended instead of giving a number of options that appeared to be a closed questioning technique. The findings identified that parents responded very positively to the provision based on their child's improved behaviour at home and the opportunity to build home-school relationships.

A second study by Bishop and Swain (Bishop and Swain, 2000b) discussed nurturing parental involvement in children with behavioural and emotional difficulties within a case study in early years provision. The study was completed in the same school as identified in earlier research (Bishop and Swain, 2000a) and is based on the findings of the earlier study. Although the findings appeared positive there was no clear data regarding the number of parents interviewed and little evidence of selection procedures that defined how these parents were chosen.

Taylor and Gulliford (2011) investigated parental perspectives on the effectiveness of home / school collaboration based on data from semi-structured interviews with parents, teachers and teaching assistants from nine

schools in the Midlands region in England. Their findings showed that the collaboration between home/school was not particularly effective. Most nurture groups in the study found that many parents did not attend formal school meetings so adopted an open-door policy that was also identified in research by Kourmoulaki (2013). Although this was not fully successful, as either parents did not take full advantage of the opportunity or it overwhelmed the nurture group staff, there was evidence that informal events were much more effective in encouraging parental involvement.

Studies were discussed earlier in section 2.2.1 that related to the nurture group curriculum. In the first of these earlier studies Sanders (2007) found that parents noticed improved levels of confidence in their child with many parents commenting that their child appeared happier in school. Also, parents observed more positive aspects of behaviour at home that supports earlier research by Bishop and Swain (2007a).

In the second of these studies, Kourmoulaki (2013) sought the views of parents in an exploratory study of secondary school nurture groups in Scotland. The findings identified that many parents valued the nurture group provision for their child with positive outcomes that included increased friendships and a development of social skills; an outcome of improved friendships supports the findings of earlier research by Sanders (2007).

Thirdly the study by Sloan et al. (2016) emphasised the approachability of nurture group staff and welcomed their 'open door' policy as identified by

Taylor and Gulliford (2011) and Kourmoulaki (2013). Parents of nurture group pupils identified positive benefits for their children that included an increased enjoyment of school that may have led to educational progress with a positive influence on their child's attitude towards school. Some parents identified improved relationships with their child at home that had a positive impact on family life and were aware that their child had built stronger relationships with other members of the nurture group.

#### **2.2.4 Staff perceptions**

In addition to gaining the perceptions of pupils and parents it is important to listen to the voice of staff, especially those working in the nurture group provision. Only four of the identified studies made reference to staff consultations.

Scott and Lee (2009) carried out a study based on 25 pupils selected from four part-time Scottish nurture groups matched against a control group in mainstream provision. The study was predominantly based on quantitative measures including the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998) supported by anecdotal evidence based on staff diaries, playground incidents and recorded negative contacts with home. The authors identified that although the control group should be matched as closely as possible, there were limitations in pupil selection in the four schools resulting in the controls groups not being entirely comparable that especially related to gender. The anecdotal evidence from staff in relation to nurture group provision was generally positive, as staff reported they felt motivated and supported by the

nurture group in their school and appeared convinced that some children would have made no progress had they remained in mainstream provision. Case studies were cited that showed improvements in independent working and coping strategies.

Binnie and Allen (2008) evaluated the effectiveness of six part time nurture groups using both qualitative and quantitative data that was triangulated from various sources. Qualitative data was provided through the perspectives from parents, teachers and head teachers through questionnaires. Quantitative data was based on the Boxall Profile (Bennathan & Boxall, 1998), the Behaviour Indicators of Self-Esteem Scale (BIOS; Burnett, 1998) and the SDQ (Goodman, 1997). Although there were relevant and positive aspects to this study there were a number of limitations. Firstly there was no control group and secondly the study takes no account of the maturation of pupils over the eight-month period of the study. Also, the sampling procedures appear to be problematic in regard to the selection of pupils and parents as there were no clear selection procedures supporting the validity of the research.

Staff perceptions indicated that nurture group provision had the greatest positive impact on pupil behaviour particularly related to raised pupil confidence and self-esteem, impact in the mainstream classroom as shown by positive improvements in independent working and engagement in group activities. Staff identified a number of opportunities that nurture group had offered that included a structured focus for individual pupils, increased

inclusion and increased access to the curriculum. The challenges identified by staff were the difficulty in liaison between nurture group staff and mainstream staff, reintegration of pupils into mainstream provision, balancing the curriculum and pupil selection.

Cooper and Lovey (1999) report on practitioners' perspectives through a questionnaire given to invited delegates at a meeting in 1998. The study findings identified that the practitioners' perceptions of nurture groups were positive and related to a number of issues that included a more positive whole school nurturing culture being adopted, immediate support based on the developmental needs of individual pupils and the ability for pupils to function effectively in a mainstream class. However, there appears to be a number of limitations to this study. Firstly, sampling procedures were questionable as identified in earlier studies (Binnie and Allen, 2008; Bishop and Swain, 2000a) as there was no selection procedure for participants as they were delegates at a national meeting that related to nurture group provision, the majority of whom were invited by the researchers. Also, as identified in the research by Bishop and Swain (2000a), there could be an element of bias from an invited audience that may have a positive perception of nurture group provision. Practitioners were enthusiastic about the potential to support mainstream staff and whole school strategies but had concerns regarding pupils being able to thrive in a mainstream setting. Binnie and Allen (2008) supported these findings by raising concerns regarding pupil reintegration.

Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) also explored staff perceptions in a study that evaluated the effectiveness of three nurture groups for primary aged pupils in the Midlands. Their research identified a number of challenges identified by nurture group staff that included the pressures of running of the group and feedback to mainstream staff regarding pupil progress. The frustration of nurture group staff was based on how progress was defined by mainstream staff as appeared to be solely based on academic progress taking little account of social and emotional development. Mainstream staff appeared to have a narrower interpretation of progress that related only to academic attainment and felt that nurture groups were not successful in increasing pupils' academic performance.

Finally, in a study by Bishop and Swain (2000a), the responses from class teachers identified a number of positive benefits for pupils but the majority of teachers highlighted the benefits for themselves in relation to the removal of pupils they identified as challenging and disruptive. This raises questions regarding the quality of training these class teachers received prior to setting up the nurture group that may have had an impact on their perceptions of how pupils would be identified.

### **2.3 Curriculum interventions**

The nurture group curriculum is different to that provided in mainstream education as the mainstream curriculum may not be appropriate for all pupils, as some vulnerable and needy pupils who struggle at school may need a modified curriculum that includes an emphasis on developing personal, social

and emotional skills (Sonnet, 2010). The fundamental premise regarding the nurture group curriculum is that identified social and emotional needs of individual pupils can be addressed through a modified curriculum based on their developmental age rather than their chronological age (Boxall, 2002). Lucas, Insley and Buckland (2006) stress that an effective nurture group curriculum is based on the developmental needs of individual pupils, being forward looking and focused upon growth and the conditions to support the development of the child.

### **2.3.1 Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL)**

The most important whole school initiative in recent years developed to support the social and emotional development of primary school pupils within the curriculum was the SEAL programme (DfCSF, 2005). It was a national initiative launched in 2004 and piloted by 25 local authorities in the UK that included the authority where I was employed that had the explicit focus of promoting pupil well-being and social and emotional development for all primary aged pupils and secondary pupils (DfCSF, 2005). It is highly relevant to nurture group provision as it aims to promote skills to promote effective learning and positive behaviour.

Through a whole school based approach SEAL focused on aspects of learning based on the five components of Daniel Goleman's model of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995). Here, there are clear parallels with the philosophy behind successful NG intervention in a number of the sub clusters in the Boxall Profile:

- ‘Sub-cluster D, *shows insightful involvement*;
- Sub-cluster F, *is emotionally secure*;
- Sub-cluster H, *accommodates to others*;
- Sub-cluster X, *negativism towards self*; and
- Sub-cluster Y, *negativism towards others*’.

(Bennathan and Boxall, 1998, p.32).

There are positive outcomes and criticisms of this whole school approach. Hallam (2009) evaluated the SEAL pilot programme and commented on the impact on children’s social, emotional and behavioural skills. The positive outcomes of the report included the introduction of the language of emotion into the schools with relevant supporting provision. However, Hallam (2009) also commented that there were considerable limitations to her research as the evaluation was carried out in a short space of time and there were no control groups. Also, the schools that participated in the evaluation were invited or recommended to do so by their LA. This questions the validity of the research, as it was not based on a representative sample of schools.

Carol Craig, Chief Executive of the Centre for Confidence and Wellbeing also evaluated the SEAL programme and raised a number of concerns stating there was no clear evidence that encouraging pupils to express their feelings and emotions would develop lifelong well-being and emotional literacy that could easily lead to self-obsession (Craig, 2007). Activities that encourage pupils to express their feelings have been criticised by some researchers. Bailey (2007) when researching practice in two nurture groups expressed



concerns about the vulnerability of some pupils in the group that could be further exasperated by taking part in such activities when the activities are poorly handled by the adults commenting that this may lead to disempowerment for both the adults and the pupils. This further emphasises the need for all nurture group staff to be fully trained, experienced and highly competent.

### **2.3.2 Play**

Section 1.2 defined nurture groups as a resource that may need to support missing early nurturing experiences for some pupils. (*About Nurture*, Nurture Group Network, 2017b). The value of play has been identified in early childhood experiences (Wood and Cook, 2009) that relates to an important element of the nurture group curriculum in developing relevant social skills and independence through play based activities to build self-esteem, confidence, self-awareness and resilience (Boxall, 2002). Although much of children's play in the nurture group is through enactment of everyday events it can also provide a way of 'working through turbulent events in a child's life as an outlet for any stress' (Boxall, 2002, p.97). Vygotsky (1978) discusses the importance of the use of play to develop social rules such when children adopt the role of different family members. As high emphasis is given on planning a relevant nurture group curriculum based on the developmental needs of pupils (Lucas, Insley and Buckland, 2006) stages of play are highly relevant. In this respect, the current research makes specific reference to Mildred Parten's highly influential stages of play (Parten, 1932) that are summarised in Table 4.

**Table 4: Parten's stages of play (1932)**

AGE	PLAY TYPE	EXPLANATION OF STAGES OF PLAY
0-2 years	Solitary	Child plays alone having limited interaction with other children.
2 – 2.5 years	Spectator	Child observes other children playing but does not interact with them.
2.5 – 3 years	Parallel	Child plays alongside others but does interact with them
3 – 4 years	Associate	Child starts to interact with others with a low level of interaction. Preferences are made to play with selected children that may develop into friendships. Child may talk about the play activity but more interested in their own situation.
4 – 6+ years	Cooperative	Plays together with others in a cooperative and organised way with assigned roles and mutually agreed-upon play themes or goals.

The role of the adults supporting these developmental stages of play needs to be considered. It is intended that nurture group staff take the role of facilitators (Boxall, 2002) to encourage these pupils to move towards associate and cooperative stages of play in order to develop their social interaction and help prepare these children for reintegration into mainstream provision where they can confidently and successfully interact with others in a group activity.

Although there appears to be agreement that children need to make decisions and choices within play activities there are varying opinions as to the role of the adult. Free choice play is encouraged in nurture groups where the adult acts as a facilitator focusing on observing and making comments (Boxall, 2002, p. 95). Wood and Cook (2009) argue that play should have minimal or no adult control whereas Wilson and Ryan (2005) argues that such

pedagogical practices can present problems for some children as the choices they make may limit their agency and identity as learners. Bombèr (2007, p.298) refers to the concept of 'mentalisation' as a strategy when working with children with attachment needs. This occurs when someone else articulates and makes links about what could be happening for a child.

### **2.3.3 Language and communication**

The nurture group curriculum emphasises the importance of language and communication (Boxall, 2002; Nurture Group Network, 2017a). Bennathan (2005) suggests that language is a way of putting feelings into words through pupils acting out their feelings in a secure environment. In the 'classic' nurture group (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007), pupils are encouraged to use words instead of actions to express their feelings alongside the opportunity for play based activities and conversations.

The nurture group timetable encourages both formal and informal communication and dialogue through structured activities such as Circle Time (Mosley, 2003) and a formal snack time along with more informal dialogue between pupils and adults that is encouraged whilst completing tasks (Boxall, 2002). The planned curriculum provides the opportunity for pupils to explore language through natural conversation in a relaxed social context (Cooper and Tiknaz 2007). Ingram (1993) comments that a conversation over lunch identifies a number of cues that participants use may relate to their upbringing and advises that if these cues are not already familiar to the participants then they need to be taught. Mercer (2009) discusses linguistic ethnographers who

emphasise that language and social life are mutually linked and exploratory classroom talk may be needed to replace a lack of social interaction at home. Wegerif et al., (2004) discuss exploratory talk in the classroom in relation to its importance in the learning process. Research by Colwell and O'Connor (2003) and Bani (2011) discuss nurture group dialogue and stress its importance in the possible development of pupil self-esteem.

## **2.4 Attachment theory**

In setting up the early nurture groups, Boxall and Bennathan, (2000) emphasised the influences of attachment theory research by John Bowlby and related research by Mary Ainsworth who elaborated the earlier work of Bowlby (1951) and developed the Strange Situation test (Ainsworth and Bell, 1970; Ainsworth et al., 1978) to help identify an infant's individual attachment style. Three attachment styles were identified: secure, insecure and avoidant (Ainsworth and Bell, 1970) with Main and Solomon (1986) adding a fourth style namely disorganised attachment.

Bowlby (1969, p.126) identified that a child's relationship with their primary caregiver develops an internal working model that is 'a cognitive framework supporting their understanding the world, self and others'. Bowlby (1973) found that babies seek their parent for basic needs to survive, using their relationship with the parent as a secure base suggesting that if the child's needs were met on a consistent basis, then the child develops a secure attachment to his or her parent. This secure attachment would then result in children being able to tolerate separation from their parent thereby showing

they have internalised the secure base established with their parent and enabling them to transfer these learned patterns 'to explore the outside world without their attachment figure needing to be physically and emotionally present' (Bombèr, 2007, p.20). It is this secure attachment that enables children to develop an internal working model to 'support the formation of lasting relationships and help define their sense of self' (Geddes, 2006). This internal working model has implications for self-confidence and expectations when experiencing the challenges of learning (Geddes, 2006).

However, there are criticisms of Bowlby's claims relating to maternal deprivation (Bowlby, 1951) by Rutter (1972) who suggested that Bowlby's understanding of maternal deprivation was oversimplified. Rutter (1981) also argued that Bowlby's arguments relating to maternal deprivation are not always as a result of a lack of attachment to a mother figure as other factors such as a lack of intellectual stimulation in early childhood need to be considered.

Marshall (2014, p.18) relates attachment theory to trauma in early childhood and cites Cairns (2002) where trauma is defined as 'a combination of external events and an internal experience'. Marshall (2014) discusses two types of trauma: type one is where the external event is usually a single incident that had a significant impact that may include bereavement, an accident, an attack or witnessing something horrible; type two is described as repetitive trauma, where the external event has been an on-going basis. Marshall (2014) identifies various symptoms of early trauma that relate to the four attachment

styles listed earlier and gives advice for practitioners on how these can be addressed in the classroom:

- 'Poor sense of identity – the child may change his or her behaviour and personality to fit in with others based on a desire to be liked and included;
- Hyper-vigilant - the child is unable to concentrate on a task for long periods due to being hyper-alert to things around them. This could be as a result of them being pre-occupied with survival and constantly on edge, looking out for danger;
- Becoming over-excited very easily – children can become over-excited by minor incidents such as losing a pencil, being ignored or not being first in a queue. This could be as a result of high levels of cortisol at birth from a stressed mother;
- An inability to describe their feelings – many children with experience of early trauma find it difficult to relate to emotions such as happy, sad, confused or surprised even though they can point to the appropriate picture that shows those emotions;
- Mistrust in relationships – many children with a history of trauma have learnt not to trust others but to become self-reliant. This created difficulties in educational settings with transitions including staff changes;
- Friendship difficulties – children who have experiences early trauma may appear at first to be confident and easily make friends but it can be a superficial friendship and sometimes difficult to sustain when they become older. This could be due to a lack of early nurturing, absence

of positive role models and the gap between their chronological age and their stage of emotional development;

- Poor listening and attention skills; and
- Do not respond to rewards and sanctions’.

*(Marshall, 2014, pp. 43-56)*

## **2.5 Links to neuroscience**

Research into neuroscience supports the understanding of relationships between brain development and attachment theory. Schore (2001) appears to support Bowlby’s attachment theory commenting that biologically, a baby is inclined to make emotional bonds with a significant adult.

Sebastian (2014) comments there is evidence that adolescents show low moods after rejection and as a result can take greater risks when accompanied by peers. The implications of this research suggests that nurture groups could help address unmet needs of a child and may help repair any damage caused during formative development. When a child’s ‘sensitivity to its signals, comfort and reassurance have not been met, then insecure attachment can result’ (Geddes, 2006, p.48). Geddes (2006) cites Johnson (1992) and Williams, O’Callaghan and Cowie (1995) who suggest that attachment experience has implications for those seeking to assist pupils in the learning process. Also, children who experience insecure attachment respond to challenge with less confidence than securely attached children (Sroufe, 1983); this is highly relevant for some pupils who are under pressure to meet academic targets. In the school situation, Barrett and Trevitt (1991)

comment that anxious children may form a specific attachment with their teacher. This is especially pertinent to nurture group provision where two adults are present to model and scaffold the learning process. Bruce Perry (Perry and Szalavitz, 2006) developed a neurosequential model that identified that children need experiences that match their developmental needs that may not necessarily be at their chronological age. This is very relevant to the nurture group curriculum as a fundamental premise is that it is based on the developmental stage of the child and not the chronological age (Lucas, Insley and Buckland, 2006)

## **2.6 Scaffolding**

One of the fundamental features of the 'classic' nurture group (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007) is that two adults model appropriate behaviour and scaffold the learning process. This section will discuss how scaffolding contributes to this learning process that relates to the nurture group curriculum. Scaffolding can be defined as a form of support based on modelling and coaching that helps pupils to learn (Sawyer, 2006). Scaffolding was first introduced by Ausubel (1970) as ideational scaffolding and discussed by Bruner (1976) as part of a social constructivist theory influenced by Vygotsky (1962).

The scaffolding in the nurture group is defined as reciprocal scaffolding (Holton and Clarke, 2006) where two or more work collaboratively thereby allowing individuals to learn from peer and / or adult experiences and knowledge. This can be a pupil learning from an adult or from each other in



the form of peer scaffolding as often the pupil can be the expert.

There are two types of scaffolding namely hard scaffolding and soft scaffolding (Saye and Brush, 2002). Scaffolding in mainstream provision tends to soft scaffolding where an adult has a dialogue with pupils to give feedback or answer questions whilst circulating the classroom (Simons and Klein, 2007). In the nurture group situation, the majority of the scaffolding is hard scaffolding (Saye and Brush, 2002) where challenging learning tasks that needed adult scaffolding would have been identified in the planning stage.

There are differing opinions as to the value in adult or peer expert scaffolding. Vygotsky (1978) commented that interacting with peers was productive in that it led to building skills and processes where adults and more competent peers could support and guide less competent pupils. Conversely, Piaget (1928) believed that less competent pupils could be reluctant to contribute when collaborating with an adult or more experienced peer, as children should have the experience of building a dialogue with peers and adults who have a different opinion.

## **2.7 Inclusion or exclusion?**

‘A special needs adviser in an inner city LA defeated in her attempts to introduce nurture groups, said of her senior officer, “He thinks it’s alright for the child to spend the day in disgrace in the head teacher’s room, but a nurture group would be harmful” ’ (Bennathan and Boxall, 1996, p. 34). This

quotation fuels the debate as to whether nurture groups are an inclusive or exclusive form of intervention. An 'inclusive education' is a difficult concept to define, as there are many concepts of inclusion each with different interpretations. In relation to nurture group provision, Cooper (2004) discusses inclusion within an educational context suggesting it is an abused word citing O'Hanlon and Thomas (2004) who state that it has become a cliché and it is very difficult to trace its provenance. Cooper (2004, p. 219) gives a definition of inclusion as 'a synonym for integration or an antonym for exclusion' and discusses that in order to promote 'active participation and engagement in the formal learning process' higher emphasis should be given to social inclusion rather than the physical location.

Inclusion needs to be defined in relation to how nurture groups fit into existing mainstream practice. A government Green Paper (DfEE, 1997) highlighted the importance of SEN pupils receiving a high quality education from classroom practitioners who need to have an increased capacity to cater for the diverse needs of SEN pupils. The Office for Standards in Education (DfES, 2004) commented that the practitioners in a number of schools in England and Wales feel they do not have the skills, experience and resources to give effective provision for SEN pupils. Rix et al., (2009) discuss the increase in inclusive practice within mainstream provision concluding that classroom practitioners have to provide an appropriate curriculum for an increasing number of SEN pupils within mainstream classrooms with little support based on relevant research.

Norwich (2009) discusses the potential tensions between having good quality provision for all and the needs of SEN pupils arguing that the needs of this subgroup of learners can be common with other children. This is a common dilemma for schools with nurture group provision that particularly relates to an appropriate curriculum. Nind and Cochrane (2002) discuss an inclusive curriculum in special schools and reach the conclusion that pupils who fall outside of their traditional population provide a significant challenge to teachers in special schools. This emphasises the importance of the need for a modified curriculum to address the diverse needs of pupils in nurture groups.

When considering parental choice and inclusivity in early years, Flewitt and Nind (2007) raise a key issue of full parental involvement in the process of special and inclusive education. This is especially important in the case of nurture group provision as, it could be seen by parents as physical exclusion from the mainstream classroom instead of inclusion unless the whole process is fully explained and understood. Parents need to understand that nurture group provision is a temporary arrangement that aims to enable the children to build skills to help them to achieve academic progress in their mainstream classroom (Boxall, 2002).

The initial nurture groups, if set up in the recommended way as an integral part of the school, were regarded as an inclusive form of provision (Bennathan and Boxall, 1996, p34) who argued that the physical inclusion of a pupil in a classroom is 'not necessarily synonymous with the active engagement of that pupil in the curriculum and social life of the classroom'.

Part of the argument that nurture group provision is an inclusive form of provision is based on the definition of the nurture group curriculum that is discussed further in section 1.6. The fundamental premise regarding the nurture group curriculum is that identified social and emotional needs of individual pupils can be addressed through a modified curriculum based on their developmental age rather than their chronological age (Lucas, Insley and Buckland, 2006). This is supported by the statutory requirement of the nurture group curriculum to follow the National Curriculum (DfE, 2014a) that has a clear inclusion statement stating that programmes of study should be applied at each child's developmental level.

However, there are arguments against the views of Bennathan and Boxall (1996) who stated that nurture groups are an inclusive practice acknowledging that early nurture groups were set up in the early 1970s when segregating SEN pupils was common practice. Bishop and Swain (2006a) raise questions about the inclusive nature of nurture groups concluding that children attending the nurture group who were at risk of exclusion had been successfully reintegrated into mainstream provision and data from interviews with staff identified that pupils did not feel isolated from mainstream provision.

Howes, Emanuel and Farrell (2002) raised questions regarding the inclusive integrity of nurture groups commenting that nurture groups are not inclusive arguing that it reduces the potential of positive peer influences when pupils are removed from mainstream provision. Howes, Emanuel and Farrell (2002) also emphasise the importance of effective communication between relevant

staff and pupils to ensure the nurture group is a coherent part of the school and thereby address any negative labelling that may be associated with nurture group provision.

With specific reference to ADHD pupils, Bailey (2014) raises a number of concerns based on his nurture group observations and challenges the idea suggested by Doyle (2006, p.255) that 'good schools are nurturing schools'. Bailey (2014, p. 119) analyses the importance of defined routines in nurture groups (Boxall, 2002) and likens them to the penal system in that pupils who appear to be 'incapable of integrating themselves into the routines of ordinary society require an intensification of routine'. In addition, Bailey (2014) discusses the timetable in the single group observed and states there is little opportunity for pupil disorder due to the highly structured nature of the timetable. However, the timetable in the group he observed contains a number of activities such as 'choosing time' and 'tidy-up' that could, if not effectively managed lead to a high level of pupil disorder that would not necessarily be attributed to a highly structured timetable. (Bailey, 2014) raises concerns about the 'feelings tree' in the nurture group he observed stating that it is valuable for pupils to reflect upon their experiences but the interpretation of pupils' reflections by the adults in the nurture group could make the pupils more vulnerable. This may be a valuable observation but it is only based on observations in a single nurture group and may not be represent other nurture groups.

## **2.8 Research Questions**

The current research will focus on the central question:

- How do pupil, parent and staff perspectives contribute towards an exploratory study of the curriculum in primary nurture groups?

To address the central question, four sub questions will be considered:

RQ1. What are the views of pupils regarding their experiences of the nurture group curriculum?

RQ2. What are the perspectives of parents regarding the nurture group curriculum in relation to the experiences of their child?

RQ3. What are the perspectives and experiences of staff regarding the nurture group curriculum and how it may relate to the mainstream curriculum?

RQ4. How the observations identified any similarities and differences between the curriculum in the nurture groups and mainstream classrooms.

## **2.9 Chapter summary**

Chapter 2 has identified and critiqued relevant literature and stated the objectives of the research based on the four research questions. The literature search (2.2) identified sixteen relevant articles based on clear inclusion criteria, the most recent being published in November 2016. A key

message that emerged from this recent research was that nurture group provision developed skills to enable pupils to further engage in the curriculum. These sixteen articles were critiqued under relevant headings based on the research questions. There was no research that specially explored the nurture group curriculum but six of the sixteen articles made references to the nurture group curriculum within their findings and identified that there was a structured but flexible approach to planning the curriculum that was based on developing social skills. The identified research suggested that pupils appeared to enjoy the nurture group curriculum and highlighted food related activities, play based activities and the freedom to choose activities. The chapter also discussed curriculum interventions and the importance of language and communication that included play based activities and how stages of play were relative to the developmental needs of pupils in the nurture group. Finally it was debated whether nurture groups are an inclusive or exclusive form of provision as it was suggested that the initial groups provided an inclusive curriculum for children who were not able to fully access the mainstream curriculum. The next chapter will discuss the methodology of the research and identify clear ontological and epistemological frameworks to support the replication of the research.

# **Chapter 3:**

# **Methodology**



### **3.1 Chapter overview**

This chapter describes the methodology used in the research. Section 3.2 covers the purpose of the research and section 3.3 explains the ontological and epistemological considerations relating to the current study. Section 3.4 discusses research participants and sampling procedures. Following this sections 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7 describe the pilot visits, research design and data collection processes. Section 3.8 discusses ethical considerations followed by section 3.9 that identifies thematic analysis as the most appropriate method of data analysis. Finally section 3.10 discusses the rigour of qualitative research.

### **3.2 Purpose of the research**

The current research was an exploratory study of the nurture group curriculum based on the perceptions of pupils, parents and staff. Robson (2011) discusses exploratory research and defines it as research that investigates a theme with few examples of existing research. In order to explore the nurture group curriculum it was vital that the pupils' opinions were sought and that both parental and staff viewpoints were taken into account. Chapter 2 identified that there was no specific research that explored the nurture group curriculum and few examples that listened and took account of the views of key stakeholders. Therefore conducting exploratory research was appropriate.

### **3.3 Ontological and Epistemological framework**

The current research could have been based on various ontological and epistemological frameworks. The next sections will define paradigms and how they relate to ontology, epistemology and methodology and consider the most

appropriate ontological and epistemological positions relevant to the current study.

### **3.3.1 Paradigms**

A paradigm can be defined as ‘a way of looking at the world’ (Mertens, 2005, p. 7) that dictate ‘what should be studied, how the research should be done and how the results should be interpreted’ (Bryman, 2004, p. 453). Paradigms can be characterised as the way their proponents respond to three basic questions relating to ontology, epistemology and methodology:

‘Ontological: What is the nature of the “knowable”? Or what is the nature of “reality”?

Epistemological: What is the nature of the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowable)?

Methodological: How should the inquirer go about finding out knowledge? ’

*(Guba, 1990, p.18).*

### **3.3.2 Ontological considerations**

Ontology can be defined as ‘reality with different ontological positions’ (Fox, Martin and Green, 2007, p. 46). Two ontological positions were considered for the current study in relation to whether social entities are considered as being objective (objectivism) or socially constructed (constructivism). A constructivist ontological position was more appropriate for the current study as it supported

the view that reality is socially constructed (Sarantakos, 1998) and understood within the context of nurture group provision.

Constructivism challenges the objectivist ontology and asserts that 'social phenomena are produced through social interaction and is in a constant state of revision' (Bryman, 2004, p.538). Schwandt, 2000 comments that active researchers socially construct knowledge and need to interpret social experiences from the viewpoint of those who have experienced it.

An objectivist approach was rejected, as the current research is socially constructed and not based on an objective reality. The objectivist viewpoint can be described as the researcher simply discovering 'a meaning that has been lying in wait all along ...and if we go about it in the right way, we can consider the objective truth' (Crotty, 1998, p.8). Objectivism implies that 'social phenomena confront us as external facts that are beyond our influence and is independent from social actors' (Bryman, 2004, p.17).

### **3.3.3 Epistemological considerations**

Epistemology is concerned with knowledge relating to 'what we can know about reality and how we can know it' (Willis, 2007, p.10). To identify the most appropriate epistemological stance for the current study, the relationship between 'the knower and the known needs to be considered' (Guba, 1990, p. 45). Three epistemological positions were identified for consideration: positivism, realism and interpretivism as discussed by Bryman (2004). A critical realist epistemological stance was more appropriate for the current

study as positivism and interpretivism were not appropriate. Critical realism is a specific form of realism that can be defined as an 'understanding of the social world that can only be changed through recognising the structures that could have an impact on the changes' (Bhaskar, 1989, p.19).

A positivist approach was rejected as a positivist epistemology is based on 'one fixed reality where a formal hypothesis is tested aiming to establish cause and effect' (Robson, 2002, p. 112). In positivist studies, the researcher has minimum interaction with research participants and uses a quantitative approach to methodology (Mertens, 2005) that is not suitable for the current study.

An interpretivist epistemology was also rejected, as interpretivists tend to study a small number of participants quite intensively to produce detailed data that 'gives an understanding of the complexities of their viewpoint and how it may change in the long term' (Knight, Buckingham and Littleton, 2014, p.12).

### **3.4 Research participants and sampling procedures**

To identify the schools and pupils, a purposive sampling technique was used based on identified criteria and the subjective judgement of the researcher. The sample was not intended to be statistically representative as selection was based on specific features within the sampled population.

The selection procedure for schools was based on the following criteria:

- The nurture group was well established and had run for at least five

years;

- All nurture group staff were trained and fully certificated by the NGN;
- The nurture groups were based on the 'classic' or 'new variant' model;
- Pupils were between the ages of 5 -11 years; and
- The nurture group was within a mainstream setting.

The selection procedure for pupils to take part in the research was based on the following criteria:

- Pupils needed to have been in a nurture group for at least one term (12 weeks) to ensure familiarity with the nurture group curriculum; and
- Pupils needed to represent both key stage 1 (KS1) and key stage 2 (KS2).

The selection of parents and staff was based on a non-probability voluntary participation approach based on the judgment of the researcher (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and snowball sampling where existing research participants identify possible new participants (Robson, 2002).

As a result of applying the above selection criteria to schools with nurture groups operating within the LA where the researcher was based, six schools were approached. The following procedure was followed:

1. The head teacher of each of the six schools was contacted by telephone;
2. Following the initial telephone call, a hard copy of the consent form with relevant information was sent to each head teacher (see Appendices 1 and 2);
3. Once consenting schools were agreed, a confirmation email was sent to each of the head teachers who consented to their school taking part in the study (see Appendix 3);
4. Key contacts for each consenting school were identified;
5. The researcher met with the key contacts from each school to discuss potential participants that included any ethical issues.
6. A consent form and relevant information were sent to parents of identified pupils (see Appendices 4 and 5);
7. Consent was obtained from pupil participants (see Appendix 6);
8. A consent form and relevant information were sent to parents to gain their consent as participants (see Appendices 7 and 8);
9. A consent form and relevant information were sent to both nurture group and mainstream staff (see Appendices 9 and 10); and
10. Following receipt of relevant consent forms interviews were arranged.

In addition to the pilot visit (see section 3.5) all participants were given the opportunity to meet the researcher before their interview so any queries or concerns could be addressed.

### **3.5 Pilot visit**

A pilot visit was arranged to each nurture group to enable the researcher to meet potential participants and begin building a rapport before the interviews. The researcher felt this would be beneficial for the pupils based on the need for effective SEBD educators to identify and address the needs of their pupils (Cole and Visser, 2005). Mertens and Ginsberg (2009) comment that developing a rapport is important in building a trusting relationship and increased participation may be as a result of becoming familiar with the community in which the evaluation is to be conducted (Earthman, 1999). In addition, participants needed to be comfortable with the researcher and it is important for them to build up an element of trust (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). The common core of skills and knowledge (DfES, 2003) discusses the positive implications of developing positive relationships with pupils using the most appropriate forms of communication. Also, these visits gave pupils, parents and nurture group staff the opportunity to question the researcher in a familiar environment.

### **3.6 Research design**

A research design can be defined as 'a framework for the collection and analysis of data' (Bryman, 2004, p. 543). A qualitative framework was appropriate as the current research adopted a constructivist ontological approach and a critical realist epistemological position. Willig (2008, p.12) defines qualitative research as aiming to 'understand people's experiences and the meaning that they place on those experiences'.

Therefore, a qualitative approach supports the exploratory framework of the current study as it generates data instead of testing theory that would be more appropriate in quantitative research.

### **3.7 Data collection**

The strategies for data collection in the current research needed to support the research questions and the method of data analysis (Willig, 2008).

Regarding the research questions, the perceptions and experiences of pupils, parents and staff participants needed to be voiced and gathered thorough an appropriate method that provided rich and illuminating data.

The chosen forms of data collection were face-to-face interviews using a semi-structured protocol with observations in nurture groups and mainstream provision. Qualitative research interviews can give a valuable insight into the life experiences of the interviewees (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006).

Other forms of data collection namely telephone interviews and self-administered questionnaires were considered and rejected, as they would not allow the interviewer to build any rapport with the interviewee or provide the opportunity to interpret non-verbal cues.

#### **3.7.1 Face-to-face interviews**

Face-to-face interviews provide a flexible approach to finding rich descriptive data allowing the researcher to modify the nature of the enquiry based on the interviewees' responses (Robson, 2011). To make profitable use of the flexibility offered by face-to-face interviews the interviewer needs considerable



skill and experience (Robson, 2011) that the interviewer has built up through extensive experience and certificated training of the interview process in previous roles. Face-to-face interviews can build rapport and trust between interviewer and interviewee and are suitable when sensitivity is needed (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Also, face-to-face interviews allow the researcher to interpret non-verbal cues such as body language and eye contact that may support better understanding of the verbal response.

Careful consideration was given to the feasibility and possible barriers of using face-to-face interviews with SEMH pupils. Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001) identified problems in gaining SEBD pupils' perceptions as pupils gave guarded answers as a negative response may have been interpreted as disloyalty to the staff and their school. The current research ensured that the practicalities of gaining rigorous data through the 'pupil voice' was given high priority (Gray, 2004) by appropriate questions and establishing a high level of trust between interviewer and interviewee (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). In addition, the researcher was highly experienced in conversing with SEMH pupils through the role of head teacher in a primary school with a nurture group that involved daily visits to support both staff and pupils.

Following the identification of face-to-face interviews as the most appropriate method of data collection for all participants, the decision of how the interviews were to be conducted was based on the needs and requirements of the participants. Three ways of conducting the interviews were considered namely individual interviews and group interviews in the forms of focus groups

and peer paired interviews. These will be considered in relation to pupils, parents and staff.

The chosen approach for face-to-face interviews with pupils was based on 'pupil voice' as the pupils were consulted regarding their preferred approach. As discussed in the literature review (see section 2.2.2) there is increasing acknowledgement in the value of consulting children and gaining their views through research and government legislation (Todd, 2003a; Todd 2003b; DfE, 2004b). Todd (2003a) argued that consulting pupils increases the likely success of their involvement in a particular strategy.

The identified pupils were given a choice of being interviewed individually or within a focus group. When consulted by nurture group staff on behalf of the researcher pupils preferred to be interviewed with a friend or peer but most expressed the view that they did not want to be interviewed individually.

Parrish et al., (2011) cite Porcellato, Dughill and Springett (2002) who evaluated the feasibility of using focus groups with younger pupils and concluded that in order to be effective they must comprise a small number of pupils who need to be involved throughout the interview process. Peer paired interviews address these criteria so are a valid approach in the collection of qualitative data.

The chosen approach for parents / caregivers was an individual one to one interview in preference to group interviews. The individual in-depth interview gives the researcher the opportunity to discuss more personal issues with participants and offers greater confidentiality than group interviews (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Also, another disadvantage of group interviews is

that some more vocal parents could dominate the group resulting in others being reluctant to speak.

Nurture group staff and mainstream staff were given the choice of being interviewed individually, in pairs or as a group. Mainstream staff chose to be interviewed individually but nurture group staff requested that they were interviewed in pairs as they felt they had many common experiences that could be shared in an interview with a colleague.

### **3.7.2 Semi-structured interviews**

As discussed in section 3.7.1, the main method of data collection for all participants was through face-to-face interviews using a semi-structured protocol. In semi-structured interviews the interviewer does not use exact questions but instead uses an adaptable interview schedule based on areas to discuss.

There are significant advantages in using semi-structured interviews in the current research. Firstly, semi-structured interviews can achieve the depth of response sought by the researcher in 'providing a rich source of data based on the participants' personal experiences' (Robson, 2002, p, 35). Secondly, semi-structured interviews support a critical realist ontological perspective, 'allowing multiple perspectives within a real world context' (Willig, 2008, p. 5). Thirdly, semi-structured interviews are a flexible form of research 'allowing the interviewer to retain overall control thereby giving the interviewee uninhibited freedom' (Drever, 1995, p.18).

To ensure rigour and consistency careful consideration was given to the questions asked of all participants that formed the interview schedules prepared for each set of participants that ensured standardisation of the interview process (see Appendix 12) that was supported through the first question in each interview being broad and open-ended to get the interviewee talking (Di Cicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006).

It was important that the questions asked needed to accurately address the research questions so the questions in each interview schedule were based on the following criteria:

- Open-ended questions as opposed to closed questions;
- Avoiding questions beginning with 'why' as they may appear threatening to the participant that could generate a defensive reply;
- Questions were arranged from the general to the more specific;
- Number of questions asked were less than ten; and
- Questions reflect the context of the research questions with sufficient information in each question so all participants understand what is being asked of them.

*(Based on Krueger (2003) and Krueger and Casey (2000)).*

Pupils were consulted during the process to ensure their voice was heard and acted upon. One example of this was shown by the researcher offering the pupils the choice of whether they wished to be interviewed singly, in pairs or in groups. As nurture group staff needed to adhere to their school's current safeguarding policy, it was agreed that pupils were interviewed in pairs in a

quiet corner of the nurture group room with one member of the nurture group staff present in the room but not taking part in the interview process. The choice of pupil pairings was based on the advice of the nurture group staff following their consultation with pupils on behalf of the researcher. Also, to help ensure the participants were at ease, the researcher was positioned alongside the pupils as opposed to directly opposite to reduce any anxiety pupils may have encountered in regard to maintaining face-to-face gaze. The adult interviews took place in the nurture group in each of the schools and took from twenty to sixty five minutes for each interview.

Fully structured interviews and unstructured interviews were considered but rejected, as they were deemed unsuitable for the current study. Fully structured interviews, where questions are pre-determined seemed more suitable for a quantitative study as a more flexible approach was needed to allow the researcher to modify questions through the use of an interview schedule. Unstructured interviews were also rejected, as the informality 'did not support the standardisation of the interview process' (Robson, 2002, p. 23).

Although there are advantages in using semi-structured interviews they have limitations as interviews can take a long time and the interviewer has less control over the direction the interview may take. Also, data from semi-structured interviews can be more time consuming to analyse.

### **3.7.3 Observations**

In addition to semi-structured interviews, observations in both nurture groups and mainstream classrooms offered a means of triangulation based on using more than a single method to collect data on the same topic (Bryman, 2004).

The qualitative observations in nurture groups and mainstream classes were unstructured as the purpose of the observations was to develop a narrative account of participant behaviours ‘in their natural settings... without using pre-determined categories of measurement or response (Adler and Adler, 1994, p.384). A structured or systematic observation schedule was inappropriate for this investigative qualitative study as there was no pre-determined observation schedule based on time sampling or other quantitative strategies. The role of the observer in the current study is that of a passive participant who sits in an unobtrusive manner with no interaction with participants (Spradley, 1980). In addition, a reflective journal was used following each observation.

To ensure a high degree of rigour in the observation process it was based on five characteristics of observations and settings defined by Patton (2002) cited by Mertens (2005):

1. ‘The physical environment where the observations will take place needs to be described to allow the reader to visualise the setting;
2. The human and social environment of the setting needs to be recognised through identification in the way that pupils were organised into groups and subgroups that may reflect on patterns of interaction,

frequency of interaction, direction of communication patterns and any changes to these patterns;

3. What would we see if we were watching the lessons observed? ;
4. Informal interaction and unplanned activities that may include learning occurring in unstructured moments through personal interactions; and
5. Taking note of non-verbal cues such as body language’.

*(Mertens, 2005, pp. 383-385).*

### **3.8 Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations for the current study were based on the British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines (BERA, 2011).

The research proposal for the current study was forwarded to the Ethics Committee at the Open University who confirmed both the design and purpose of the study were ethically sound. (see Appendix 11).

Full compliance with BERA (2011) guidelines ensured that all participants gave their voluntary informed consent. The head teachers of identified schools gave their permission for the study to be conducted in their school. Following this initial agreement from schools, written informed consent from parents / caregivers was obtained to allow their child to be a participant in the research. Informed consent was then obtained from pupils, parents / caregivers and staff. All participants were given clear information about the study and their expected role through letters and information with the opportunity for them to contact the researcher prior to their interview. Correspondence with participants emphasised the confidential nature of the data and its storage with all participants having the right to withdraw from the

research at any stage (Robson, 2002). It was made clear that all data in the current study would be fully anonymised and deleted / destroyed on completion of the research.

Once parental / caregiver consent was obtained it was important to consult the pupils to obtain their agreement and ensure that their participation was voluntary and not because they felt under pressure to participate from either their parents or their school. Following the pilot visit to each nurture group (see section 3.5) pupils were spoken to by the researcher and a member of the nurture group staff to explain the research, emphasise it was voluntary, inform them they could withdraw at any time and explain they did not have to answer the question if they did not feel comfortable. The pupils were given a letter that allowed them to give written permission. Following discussions between the researcher and nurture group staff it was appreciated that some pupils would be unable to read this letter unaided so, following the pilot visit the nurture group staff arranged individual pupil meetings to read through this letter to ensure all pupils understood the content and expectations before signing. This letter covered the all the relevant ethical considerations (BERA, 2011) that were included in the letters to parents and staff.

The researcher needed to ensure the wellbeing of each participant was of high priority. In regard to the environment where the interviews were conducted, a familiar quiet location was chosen with minimal disruption thereby ensuring participants could be relaxed and comfortable. Time was built into the interview process to allow for a full debrief where consenting



participants could be given advice regarding supporting agencies if this was necessary (Willig, 2008). Should any level of risk be identified in the interview process, the interviewer would make a referral to the appropriate authorities (HCPC, 2012).

### **3.9 Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to analyse and interpret qualitative data in the current study with the aim of identifying recurring patterns of meaning (themes) across the data that relate to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis relates to the critical realist perspective (Willig, 2008) and can be used to analyse the responses of varying questions related to experiences and feelings (Clarke and Braun, 2013). This was relevant within the current study as the researcher sought to examine how pupils, parents and staff felt about the nurture group curriculum and identify commonalities of perception and experience. In addition, using thematic analysis can be of benefit to under-researched topics, such as the current research, or where participants' views are unknown (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As there is a lack of research investigating the viewpoints of pupils, parents and staff about the impact of nurture groups upon the curriculum, thematic analysis was felt to most beneficial. Thematic analysis also offers a high level of flexibility allowing multiple theories to be applied across a range of epistemologies (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

### **3.9.1 Rationale for selection**

There are many approaches to the collection and analysis of data based on entomological and epistemological frameworks (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012) that need to be based on the focus of the research (Holloway and Todres, 2003). An appropriate method of data analysis for the current research needed to uncover 'patterns, insights, and understandings' (Patton, 2002, p. 25). In addition to thematic analysis, the qualitative approaches considered included interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) and grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006).

IPA was initially considered as being suitable for the current study as it shares a number of features with thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012). The analytical processes for thematic analysis and IPA are similar as both methods draw out themes from immersion in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and both methods are concerned with understanding social experiences (Huxley, Clarke and Halliwell, 2011). However it is the differences between the two approaches that led to the IPA being rejected. IPA focuses on detailed accounts of individual experiences that require the researcher to build a detailed picture of the individual participant (Willig, 2008; Brocki & Wearden, 2006). In contrast, thematic analysis offers a more flexible approach that can help consider broader phenomena based on recurrent themes and commonalities based on participants' perceptions and experiences of nurture group practice that related to the nurture group curriculum.

In addition to IPA, grounded theory was also considered as a suitable method of data analysis but also rejected. Grounded theory seeks to develop theory from the data (Howitt & Cramer, 2011) and there are advantages to grounded theory as it 'fosters creativity and the potential to conceptualize ...alongside providing for data depth and richness' (Hussein et al., 2014, p. 8) but the disadvantages outweigh the advantages for the current study.

The disadvantages of grounded theory are that it is only at the later stages of the analysis that any relevant theories may emerge (Bulmer, 1979), the potential for methodological error (Hussein et al., 2014) and the time taken to transcribe recordings of interviews (Bryman, 2004).

Also, considering the sample size and data set, the flexibility of thematic analysis allows it to be suitable for both small sample sizes (Joffe and Yardley, 2004) and large data sets thereby allowing researchers to widen the ranges of the study beyond individual personal experiences (Guest, 2012). In relation to IPA, a single case study is preferred (Smith, 2004) but it is recommended that three participants is an ideal number for researchers new to the IPA process to allow a rigorous analysis and to avoid being overwhelmed by the vast amount of data produced with a larger sample (Smith and Osborn, 2007). As the sample size in the current study well exceeds these recommendations, this method of data analysis was deemed unsuitable.

### 3.9.2 Thematic analysis process

To address any concerns that thematic analysis could be too vague (Holloway and Todres, 2003) a structured approach that allowed a methodological analysis of data (Astride-Sterling, 2001) was adopted based on six clear stages as defined in Table 5.

**Table 5: The six phases of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis (2006)**

<b>1</b>	Becoming familiar with the data
<b>2</b>	Generating initial codes
<b>3</b>	Searching for themes
<b>4</b>	Reviewing themes
<b>5</b>	Defining and naming themes
<b>6</b>	Producing the report

All interviews were recorded by dictaphone and then transcribed line by line (see Appendix 13 for a phase 1 example and Appendix 14 for a phase 2 example); a colleague checked the accuracy of one transcript. The analysis process followed the six phases as identified in Table 5. Emergent codes were reviewed against the research questions ensuring that only the codes that made a significant contribution were included (Braun and Clark, 2006). Following this, themes and sub-themes were identified based on the number of similar experiences conveyed by participants. Field notes were coded

manually to provide additional information relating to the context of the interviews. The analysis took place over 30 days. Throughout the thematic analysis process the researcher ensured reflexivity based on an awareness of the impact of any bias in previous roles achieved through self-reflective notes and field notes during the data collection stage.

### **3.10 Rigour of qualitative research**

It is important that the current qualitative research produces findings that are rigorous and trustworthy (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). In relation to the semi-structured interviews careful consideration was given to the questions asked of all participants, especially of those directed to pupils. To ensure consistency in the current study, interview schedules were prepared for each set of pupils, parents and staff participants that ensured standardisation of the interview process. The questions in each interview schedule were based on set criteria based on Krueger (2003) and Krueger and Casey (2000). The quality of the current study was based on four criteria:

- 'Sensitivity to context;
- Commitment and rigour;
- Transparency and coherence; and
- Impact and importance'.

*(Yardley, 2000, p. 246).*

Evidence of sensitivity was based on the researcher ensuring the aims of the research were made clear to all participants that included their specific role. The importance of rapport building with participants was addressed through

the pilot visit to each nurture group (see section 3.5) and during the interviews the researcher ensured all participants were encouraged to feel comfortable and relaxed in an environment that was familiar to all, especially in regard to the pupils and parents. The researcher tried to phrase the questions sensitively and participants were made aware that should they become upset, a full debrief would be available with the researcher and a trusted adult within the school.

Commitment and rigour was demonstrated by the rigorous analysis of data through a thematic analysis approach that was fully adhered to throughout the research process.

Yardley (2008, p. 34) defines transparency as 'how well the reader can see exactly what was done and why'. This was addressed through providing detailed descriptions of how data was obtained and analysed. In addition, all interviews were transcribed verbatim (Robson, 2002) and the logical presentation of the current research enabled any reader who may not be familiar with nurture groups to comprehend the various stages of research supported by clear definitions of key terminology. Also, the researcher ensured that participants were made fully aware of the nature of the research before they agreed to take part that included the process to ensure anonymity and their possible withdrawal.

The impact and importance of the research is the final category of Yardley's (2000) criteria. The current research meets this expectation through its

exploratory nature in seeking new insights into the nurture group curriculum by exploring the perceptions of pupils, parents and staff.

### **3.11 Chapter Summary**

This first section of the chapter looked at the relevant ontological and epistemological frameworks for the current study concluding that a constructivist ontological position and a critical realist epistemological approach were most suitable. Following this, clear criteria were identified in the selection of schools and participants with comments relating to the benefits of arranging a pilot visit to each of the identified schools. Face-to-face interviews and non-participant interviews were identified as the most appropriate approach to provide rich and illuminating data based on the research questions; clear evidence was provided regarding the rigour of chosen methods. The differing approaches to face-to-face interviews in relation to pupils, parents and staff were considered in relation to individual interviews, peer interviews or group interviews. The chosen method of data analysis was thematic analysis with a clear rationale describing the advantages of this approach as opposed to other methods that were considered. The following chapter will focus on data interpretations and these findings will be summarised for further expansion during Chapter Five.

# **Chapter 4:**

# **Findings**



## **4.1 Chapter overview**

Chapter Four summarises the individual themes and subthemes with illustrative excerpts from the interviews. The key themes were identified through analysis of the data collected from observations in nurture groups and mainstream classes and interviews with pupils, parents, nurture group staff and mainstream staff. There are four thematic maps, one each for parents, pupils and staff and observations (see Appendices 15-18).

To ensure anonymity, participants were given a number and a prefix that identified them as a pupil (PU), a parent or caregiver (PC), member of nurture group staff (NG) or a member of mainstream staff (MS). The specific names of the nurture groups mentioned by participants have been changed to the generic term of 'nurture group'.

## **4.2 Description of nurture group provision and interview participants**

The participants in this research were sixteen pupils (m=12, f=4) aged between 6 and 9 years (mean=7.0), ten parents/caregivers (m=2, f=8), six nurture group staff (m=0, f=6) and two mainstream staff (m=0, f=2) in three primary schools in a county in the North of England as shown in Tables 7-9, 12-14 and 17-19.

Table 6 gives detailed information about nurture group provision in School 1 that includes staffing, the duration it has been running, the number of pupils in the group, room layout in relation to NGN guidance and curriculum provision

**Table 6 – Details of nurture group provision in School 1**

School Information	Nurture group information	Nurture group staffing
<p>Mainstream Junior School</p> <p>115 pupils</p> <p>56% pupils free school meals (FSM)</p>	<p>Running for 7 years.</p> <p>Part time provision: 5 afternoons a week</p> <p>Number of pupils in the group: 6</p> <p>Current group: 4 boys, 2 girls.</p>	<p>Two staff:</p> <p>1 Teacher</p> <p>1 Learning Mentor</p>
Room Layout		Curriculum Provision
<p>The nurture group room met the NGN recommendations (Lucas, Insley &amp; Buckland, 2006).</p> <p>The nurture group sessions were held in a designated room with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kitchen area</li> <li>• Dining area</li> <li>• Role play area</li> <li>• Reading area with cushions</li> <li>• Teaching area</li> <li>• IT area with</li> <li>• Display boards to present children's work achievements.</li> </ul>		<p>The group provided an explicit and predictable routine in each session:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome</li> <li>• Sharing of news since last session</li> <li>• Outline of the activities in each session</li> <li>• Set sessions each with a planned curriculum focus</li> <li>• Free choice activity that including dressing up or play.</li> <li>• Snack time with clear routines of table setting and serving food carried out by nominated pupils.</li> <li>• Specific activities were planned that related to understanding and regulation of emotions</li> <li>• Closing Circle Time session to reflect on the session, plan ahead to the next session and celebrate achievements.</li> </ul> <p>The curriculum was planned in liaison with relevant key stage 2 colleagues. It followed the National Curriculum for key stage 2 but was differentiated according to the individual needs of each pupil that included reference to the key stage 1 National Curriculum.</p> <p>Curriculum targets were based on the outcomes of the analysis of the Boxall Profile in order to support areas requiring further support and development. References were made in the planning to supportive strategies and resources in 'Beyond the Boxall Profile' (Evans, 2006).</p>

Table 7 provides details of pupil participants in School 1 including their gender, age, time spent in the nurture group and any relevant characteristics.

**Table 7 – Details of pupil participants in School 1**

Pupil	Gender	Key stage	Age	Time in nurture group	Characteristics
PU1	M	2	9y 3m	18 weeks	ADHD referral
PU2	M	2	9y 5m	12 weeks	School exclusion re. behavioural issues
PU3	M	2	8y 9m	36 weeks	Referral to Educational Psychologist
PU4	F	2	9y 1m	36 weeks	Referral to behaviour team Living with grandparents Rejected by mother
PU5	F	2	8y 9m	24 weeks	
PU6	M	2	8y 8m	24 weeks	Father in prison

Table 8 provides details of the parents / caregivers interviewed in School 1 that includes the relationship with the pupil and any relevant personal characteristics.

**Table 8 – Details of parent / caregiver participants in School 1**

Parent/ Caregiver	Relationship with pupil	Personal characteristics
PC1	Mother of Pupil 1	Gender: Female Single parent Additional needs: None Other professionals: Social care
PC2	Mother of Pupil 6	Gender: Female Additional needs: Other professionals: Child and family group
PC3	Grandmother of Pupil 4	Gender: Female Additional needs: Disabled Other professionals: None

Table 9 provides details of staff participants in School 1 that includes relevant personal characteristics including their gender, role, the date they were trained and how many years they have worked in nurture group provision.

**Table 9 – Details of staff participants in School 1**

Staff	Personal characteristics
Nurture group NG1	Gender: Female Trained: 2007 Years in nurture group: 7 Role: Teacher
Nurture group NG2	Gender: Female Trained 2009 Years in nurture group: 3 Role: Learning Mentor
Mainstream MS1	Gender: Female Role: Teacher Years in role: 24
Mainstream MS2	Gender: Female Role: Teacher Years in role: 2

Table 10 provides details of the number and duration of observations carried out in the nurture group and mainstream classroom.

**Table 10 – Details of observations in School 1**

Place of observation	Number of observations	Information
Nurture group	1	One morning session – duration 3 hours
Mainstream classroom Year 5	1	26 pupils One literacy lesson – 1 hour Two nurture group pupils included in lesson (PU1 and PU2).

Table 11 gives detailed information about nurture group provision in School 2 that includes staffing, how long it been running, the number of pupils in the group, room layout in relation to NGN guidelines and curriculum provision.

**Table 11– Details of nurture group provision in School 2**

School Information	Group information	Staffing
Mainstream primary School (with nursery)  315 pupils  45% pupils FSM	Running for 8 years.  Part time provision: 5 afternoons a week  Number of pupils in the group: 5  Current group: 4 boys, 1 girl.	Two staff:  1 Teacher 1 Learning Mentor
Room Layout		Curriculum Provision
<p>The nurture group room met the NGN recommendations (Lucas, Insley &amp; Buckland, 2006).</p> <p>The nurture group sessions were held in a designated room with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kitchen area</li> <li>• Dining area</li> <li>• Role play area with puppets</li> <li>• Reading area with cushions</li> <li>• Teaching area</li> <li>• Display boards to present children's work achievements.</li> <li>• Outdoor facilities including patio and garden</li> </ul>		<p>The group provided an explicit and predictable daily routine:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circle Time to introduce the session</li> <li>• Visual timetable based on moveable icons that represented the activities covered during the session.</li> <li>• Planned activities each with a curriculum focus</li> <li>• Snack time with clear routine of setting table and serving food.</li> <li>• Free choice activity</li> <li>• Play session based on the curriculum theme using puppets supported by the two adults.</li> <li>• Closing session to reflect on the session, plan ahead to the next session and celebrate achievements.</li> <li>• Set periods were allocated to activities focused upon building language and social communication through co-operative structured games</li> </ul> <p>The curriculum was planned in liaison with relevant key stage 1 and 2 colleagues. It followed the National Curriculum for key stages 1 and 2 and was differentiated according to the individual needs of each pupil.</p>

Table 12 provides details of pupil participants in School 2 including their gender, age, time spent in the nurture group and relevant characteristics.

**Table 12 – Details of pupil participants in School 2**

Pupil	Gender	Age	Time in nurture group	Characteristics
PU7	M	7y 1m	24 weeks	
PU8	F	6y 10m	24 weeks	
PU9	M	7y 2m	24 weeks	ADHD referral
PU10	M	7y 3m	24 weeks	

Table 13 provides details of the parents / caregivers interviewed in School 2 that includes the relationship with the pupil and any relevant personal characteristics.

**Table 13 – Details of parent / caregiver participant in School 2**

Parent/ Caregiver	Relationship with pupil	Personal characteristics
PC4	Mother of Pupil 8	Gender: Female Additional needs: None Other professionals: None

Table 14 provides details of staff participants in School 2 that includes relevant personal characteristics including their gender and role, the date they were trained and how many years they have worked in nurture group provision.

**Table 14 – Details of staff participants in School 2**

Staff	Personal characteristics
Nurture group NG3	Gender: Female Trained: 2004 Years in nurture group: 8 Role: Teacher
Nurture group NG4	Gender: Female Trained 2004 Years in nurture group: 8 Role: Teaching assistant

Table 15 provides details of the number and duration of observations carried out in the nurture group and mainstream classroom in School 2.

**Table 15 – Details of observations in School 2**

Place of observation	Number of observations	Information
Nurture group	1	One morning session – duration 2.5 hours
Mainstream classroom Year 3	1	22 pupils One literacy lesson – 50 minutes One nurture group pupil included in lesson (PU10).

Table 16 gives detailed information about nurture group provision in School 3 that includes staffing, how long it been running, the number of pupils in the group, room layout in relation to NGN guidelines and curriculum provision.

**Table 16 – Details of nurture group in School 3**

School Information	Nurture group information	Nurture group staffing
<p>Mainstream Infant School</p> <p>95 pupils</p> <p>62% pupils free school meals (FSM)</p>	<p>Running for 10 years.</p> <p>Part time provision: 4 afternoons a week</p> <p>Number of pupils in the group: 8</p> <p>Current group: 6 boys, 2 girls.</p>	<p>Two staff:</p> <p>1 Teacher</p> <p>1 Teaching Assistant</p>
Room Layout	Curriculum Provision	
<p>The nurture group room met the NGN recommendations (Lucas, Insley &amp; Buckland, 2006).</p> <p>The nurture group sessions were held in a designated room with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kitchen area</li> <li>• Dining / Teaching area</li> <li>• Role play area with a variety of dressing up clothes</li> <li>• Reading area with cushions</li> <li>• Display boards to present children's work achievements.</li> <li>• Outdoor facilities including play facilities, patio and garden</li> <li>• Sand tray and water play facilities</li> <li>• Mirror</li> </ul>	<p>The group provided an explicit and predictable routine in each session:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome</li> <li>• Outline of the activities in each session</li> <li>• Set sessions each with a planned curriculum focus</li> <li>• Free choice activity that including dressing up or play.</li> <li>• Play activities based on the theme from mainstream classes</li> <li>• Snack time with clear routines of table setting and serving food carried out by nominated pupils.</li> <li>• Specific activities were planned that related to listening, sharing and developing fine motor skills</li> <li>• Closing Circle Time session to reflect on the session, plan ahead to the next session and celebrate achievements.</li> </ul> <p>The curriculum was planned in liaison with relevant key stage 1 colleagues. It followed the National Curriculum for key stage 1 but was differentiated according to the individual needs of each pupil that included reference to Early Years provision.</p> <p>Curriculum targets were based on the outcomes of the analysis of the Boxall Profile in order to support areas requiring further support and development. References were made in the planning to supportive strategies and resources in 'Beyond the Boxall Profile' (Evans, 2006).</p>	



Table 17 provides details of pupil participants in School 3 including their gender, age, time spent in the nurture group and any identified characteristics.

**Table 17 – Details of pupil participants in School 3**

Pupil	Gender	Age	Time in nurture group	Characteristics
PU11	M	6y 1m	12 weeks	Hearing difficulties
PU12	M	6y 2m	24 weeks	Referral to Educational Psychological Services
PU13	M	6y 0m	24 weeks	Identified learning difficulties
PU14	M	5y 10m	15 weeks	
PU15	M	6y 3m	20 weeks	Concerns regarding eyesight
PU16	F	5y 11m	18 weeks	

Table 18 provides details of the parents / caregivers interviewed in School 3 that includes the relationship with the pupil and any relevant personal characteristics.

**Table 18 – Details of parent / caregiver participants in School 3**

Parent/ caregiver	Relationship with pupil	Personal characteristics
PC5	Mother of Pupil 13	Gender: Female Additional needs: Disabled Other professionals: None
PC6	Father of pupil 13	Gender: Male Additional needs: None Other professionals: None
PC7	Mother of pupil 16	Gender: Female Additional needs: None Other professionals: None
PC8	Father of pupil 14	Gender: Male Additional needs: None Other professionals: None
PC9	Grandmother of pupil 11	Gender: Female Additional needs: Single parent Other professionals: Social care
PC10	Grandmother of pupil 12	Gender: Female Additional needs: Single parent Other professionals: Social care

Table 19 provides details of staff participants in School 3 that includes relevant personal characteristics including their gender, their role, the date they were trained and how many years they have worked in nurture group provision.

**Table 19 – Details of staff participants in School 3**

Staff	Personal characteristics
Nurture group NG5	Gender: Female Trained: 2006 Years in nurture group: 6 Role: Teacher
Nurture group NG6	Gender: Female Trained 2012 Years in nurture group: 1 Role: Teaching assistant

Table 20 provides details of the number and duration of observations carried out in the nurture group and mainstream classroom in School 3.

**Table 20 – Details of observations in School 3**

Place of observation	Number of observations	Information
Nurture group	1	One morning session – duration 2 hours
Mainstream classroom Year 2	1	22 pupils One science lesson – 45 minutes Two nurture group pupils included in lesson (PU15 and PU16).

### 4.3 Pupil interviews – Themes identified

Following analysis of the pupil data, three themes were identified: curriculum, relationships and environment. Within each of these themes, further sub-themes were identified. Figure 2 shows a code map for the three themes identified following analysis of the data from the pupil interviews.

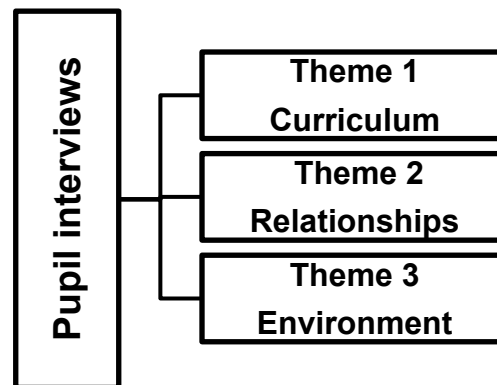


Figure 2: Code map of Pupil interviews - Themes

#### 4.3.1 Theme 1: Curriculum

The Curriculum Theme was characterised by pupils' experiences of the nurture group curriculum. The data for this theme is organised into three subthemes that are now explored more fully (see Figure 3 for code map).

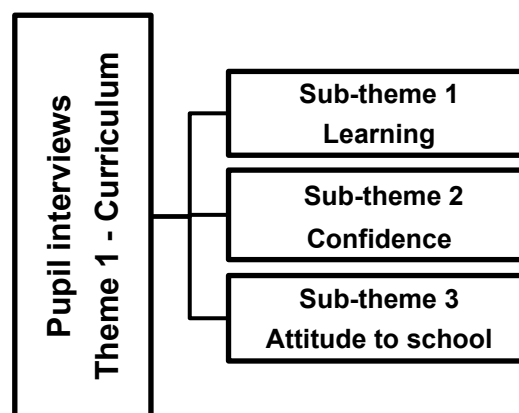


Figure 3: Code map of Pupil interviews – Theme 1

### Sub-theme 1: Learning

When asked about their learning in the nurture group, 10 pupils commented that they felt they had learned more in the nurture group because learning was fun and enjoyable.

*'We do more fun stuff in the nurture group. It's different and I learn better'. (PU8, interview 4, line 12)*

*'I have learnt more and it's fun'. (PU11, interview 6, line 2)*

*'More fun stuff so it's easier to learn'. (PU1, interview 1, line 3)*

*'Fun maths better than class...I didn't learn much before'. (PU4, interview 2, lines 14-15)*

Three pupils identified specific areas of the curriculum where they felt they had improved. This included handwriting, writing and numeracy:

*'My handwriting is better 'cos I enjoy doing it now'. (PU5, interview 3, line 16)*

*'I have learned more in the nurture group with Mrs X and Miss Y as I learned nowt (nothing) in class 'cos I was always messing around and it was too hard like especially numeracy 'cos I hated that like 'cos I was useless. My Gran says my reading is better and she can read my writing. (PU3, interview 1, lines 23-2)*

*'I can now count to 10 and write a sentence with capital letters and full stops...I couldn't do that before. (PU14, interview 7, lines 6-7)*

Four other pupils favoured practical activities that included painting, cookery and snack time. :

*'I like making things and painting and cooking (Pause) like the ginger*

*biscuits we made yesterday that my Mam said were better than Tesco's (giggles). (PU2, interview 1, lines 36-37)*

*'I like serving the orange and helping to wash the dishes'. (PU4, interview 3, line 8)*

*'I like snack time and making the toast'. (PU2, interview 1, line 5)*

*'I like snack time and helping to give out the drinks and fruit. (PU 12, interview 5, lines 14-15)*

Pupils appeared to enjoy play related activities:

*'I like playing with the puppets and making up games in the dressing up corner' (PU 10, interview 5, line 12)*

*'My favourite bit is the dressing up corner' (PU 16, interview 8, line 12)*

*'I like playing with Lego' (PU 15, interview 8, line 14)*

Three pupils commented on the value of free play or 'choosing':

*'It's good to 'choose' in the afternoon. I like playing with the Lego. We can't 'choose' in class, as there's no choice. (PU6, interview 3, lines 17-18)*

*'I like to 'choose' so I go the play corner' (PU 13, interview 7, line 18)*

*'I like the afternoons as we can 'choose'. (PU 9, interview 5, line 6)*

However some pupils felt the work in the nurture group that specifically related to mathematics, although enjoyable, was easier compared to that provided by mainstream provision:

*'Maths is fun but it's easier than in class (PU1, interview 1, line 7)*

*‘ The numeracy work in the Nurture Group is good but easier than class (PU6, interview 3, line 5)*

*‘ I enjoy the group work but it’s easy for me as I’m good at numeracy (PU5, interview 3, lines 22-23)*

Two of the year five pupils interviewed made reference to wanting to do more ‘work’ in the Nurture Group; their concept of ‘work’ being mainly writing with reference to mathematics and reading:

*‘ The nurture group is fun but sometimes I want to do more work....such as maths and writing’. (PU6, interview 3, lines 8-9)*

*‘ I like writing long stories about horses by myself in class so I miss that a bit as we don’t do much writing in the nurture group. (PU7, interview 4, lines 13-14)*

### **Sub-theme 2: Confidence**

When asked about anything that had improved or changed since joining the nurture group several pupils commented that they felt more confident following nurture group provision. These pupils made specific reference to skills gains through curriculum provision that led to improved confidence:

*‘ My handwriting was better than before so I felt more confident in writing with a pen’. (PU4, interview 2, line 8)*

*‘ I could draw better than before so it made me feel confident so I knew I could it in class. (PU 12, interview 6, line 22)*

*‘ I felt I was getting better at writing in the Nurture Group so it made me more confident to give it a try in my class’. (PU6, interview 3, line 22)*

A number of pupils discussed their higher levels of confidence as a result of nurture group provision. Some related this to increased levels of confidence that included out of school activities:

*'I can now go swimming with my friend as used to lack confidence before and thought everybody would laugh at me in the big pool'. (PU4, interview 2, line 12)*

*'I love playing the games as I couldn't play them before so I feel that the next time we play them at home I will be just as good. (PU15, interview 8, lines 18-19)*

*'But now I am more confident and can do things by myself as before I needed help.' (PU5, interview 3, lines 20-21)*

### **Subtheme 3: Attitude to school**

Three pupils expressed the view that they had a very negative attitude to school prior to nurture group provision and that in many cases their attitude had become more positive to school in general and some specifically commented on improved relationships with their mainstream teacher:

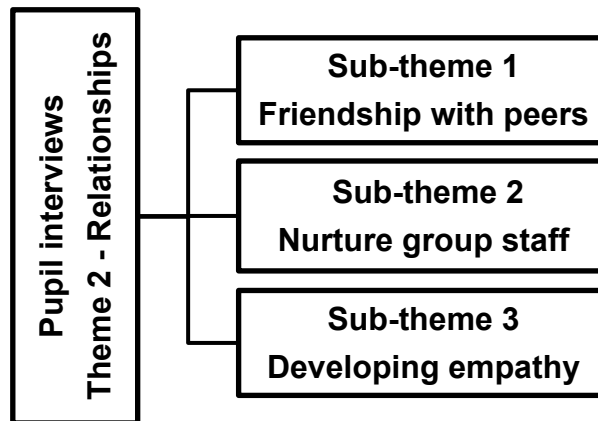
*'I hated school 'cos all the teachers had a downer on me. Now it's better and I can go into class without her (class teacher) screaming at me. It's better but I still don't like it'. (PU2, interview 1, lines 16-19)*

*'Before the nurture group I had to be dragged out of bed every morning or I hid so my Mam had to find me 'cos I hated school' (giggles). I always hid in my brother's bedroom 'cos I couldn't think of anywhere else to hide as she always found me'. (PU3, interview 3, lines 17-21)*

*‘ I seem to get on better with my teacher now and she seems to like me more’. (PU13, interview 7, lines 12-13)*

#### **4.3.2 Theme 2: Relationships**

The Relationships Theme was characterised by pupils’ experiences of interacting with nurture group staff, mainstream staff and other pupils. The data for this theme is organised into three subthemes that are now explored in more detail (see Figure 4 for code map).



**Figure 4: Code map of pupil interviews – Theme 2**

##### **Sub-theme 1: Friendship with peers**

Three pupils interviewed commented that a positive outcome of nurture group intervention was making new friends. Some pupils said they struggled to make friends in mainstream classes and were unable to find a ‘best’ friend. A number of pupils were concerned that they were not able to make secure friendships in their mainstream class and some related this to their own anxieties and negative behaviours. Some pupils commented that shared



activities in the nurture group had helped them to make new friends.

*‘ I have a special friend in the nurture group ‘cos I didn’t really have one special friend in class’. (PU7, interview 4, lines 28-29)*

*‘ I used to like playing by myself with the Lego and that but now I play with my friend’. (PU13, interview 7, lines 23-24)*

*‘ I have new friends now in the nurture group but I did not have any real friends before. I didn’t like having no proper friends in class as I wanted to join in and make friends but they wouldn’t let me ’. (PU10, interview 5, lines 14-18)*

One year five pupil was able to reflect on why she was better able to make new friends since joining the nurture group:

*‘I’ve made new friends since September like ‘cos I’ve calmed down and ‘cos I’m less angry and I think they like me more than in class’. (PU4, interview 2, lines 22-24)*

A number of pupils made reference to the shared activities in the nurture group that had led to them making new friends.

*‘ I like playing the games in the nurture group. We play Monopoly and I always lose. Mary always wins but I like her, as she is clever. She is my friend now. (PU16, interview 8, lines 21-23)*

*‘ Building the Viking ship was great. I did the bit at the front with Michael ‘cos I knew he couldn’t do it. He is my new ‘bestest’ friend. (PU6, interview 3, lines 20-22)*

### **Sub-theme 2: Nurture group staff**

It was clear from the analysis of the data that the majority of pupils spoke very highly of the nurture group staff and the support they had been given. There was evidence of bonding with nurture group staff. However, some pupils made negative comments regarding the relationships with their mainstream teacher:

*‘ I really like Mrs X (nurture group teacher) ‘cos she listens’.*

(PU16, interview 8, line 10)

*‘ When we play games Mrs X and Mrs Y (nurture group staff) make it fun but help me to play the game and explain things’.* (PU7, interview 4, lines 18-21)

*‘ I hate my teacher ‘cos she shouts at me all the time (pause) but it’s different in the nurture group as it’s quiet and they help me to work better and be better behaved’.* (PU4, interview 2, line 18-21)

*‘ I love Mrs A and Mrs B (nurture group staff) as they helped me to be better’.* (PU11, interview 4, lines 13-14)

### **Sub-theme 3: Developing empathy**

Four the pupils expressed the view that making new friends in the nurture group or sharing experiences had lead to an increased understanding of the viewpoint and difficulties associated with other pupils in the provision:

*‘ I made a new friend in the nurture group who is my best friend and we played games. I won but he was still my ‘bestest’ friend. He could not*

*move his cat round the board so I helped him as his hands don't work that well'. (PU14, interview 7, lines 12-15)*

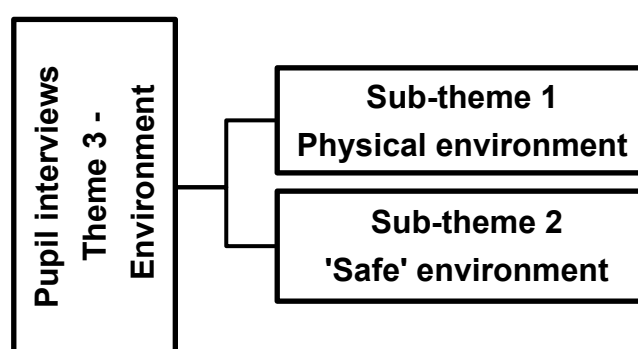
*'I liked Daniel and I knew he could not paint very well so I helped him paint a picture of his dad'. (PU10, interview 7, lines 8- 9)*

*'We made this Viking ship. I helped Leanne 'cos I knew she couldn't do this stuff as she is crap'. (PU3, interview 2, lines 14-15)*

*'I am a good reader so I helped Joe as I know he struggled with his reading and he said he worried about it as he was behind everyone else'. (PU2, interview 1, lines 25-27)*

#### **4.3.3 Theme 3: Environment**

The data for the Environment Theme is organised into two sub-themes that are now explored in more detail (see Figure 5 for code map).



**Figure 5: Code map of Pupil interviews – Theme 3**

Seven pupils made reference to the homely nurture group environment:

*‘I love the comfy sofa’* (PU 8, interview 4, line 17)

*‘I can read cuddled up on the sofa like at home’* (PU11, interview 6, line 8)

*‘I like the kitchen as it is like my Nana’s’* (PU12, interview 6, line 8)

*‘It’s quiet so I can get on with my work better’* (PU15, interview 8, line 6)

*‘I can chill in the nurture group room’* (PU1, interview 1, line 12)

*‘I can relax in the reading corner’* (PU9, interview 5, line 14)

*‘I think I learn better as it is quiet’* (PU 7, interview 4, line 6)

Some pupils made reference to the nurture group being a ‘safe’ environment.

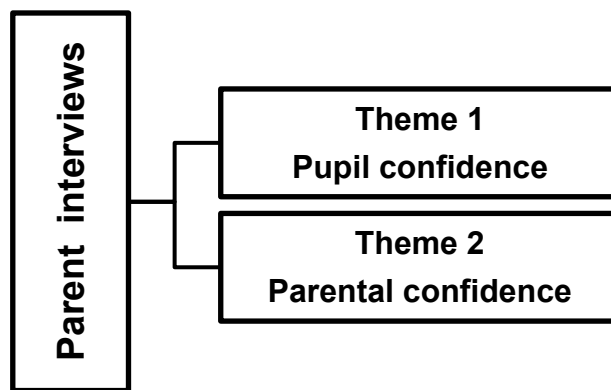
*‘I feel more comfortable in the nurture group as there’s no pressure’*  
(PU 1, interview 1, line 18)

*‘No one makes fun of me here’* (PU 10, interview 5, line 21)

*‘There’s no one to bully me’* (PU 14, interview 7, line 20)

#### **4.4 Parent interviews – Themes identified**

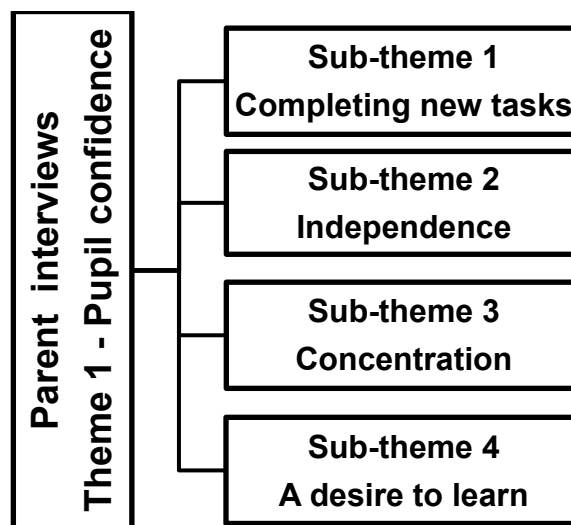
Following analysis of the data from parents, two themes were identified: pupil confidence and parental confidence as shown in Figure 6. Within each of these themes, further subthemes were identified that will be discussed.



**Figure 6: Code map of parent interviews – Themes**

#### **4.4.1 Theme 1: Pupil confidence**

The data for this theme is organised into four sub-themes that are now explored in more detail (see Figure 7 for code map).



**Figure 7: Code map of parent interviews – Theme 1**

A theme that repeatedly emerged in the data analysis was that of pupil confidence. Most of the parents interviewed commented that as a result of nurture group intervention they noticed that their child was more confident in a

variety of situations that led to confidence in trying out new tasks, increased independence, improved concentration and an increased desire to learn. When asked if there were any differences in their child since starting the Nurture Group provision these parents commented that their child appeared more confident:

*‘ The biggest change I have noticed since he started the nurture group in September is his increase in confidence in loads of things...he seems like a new person’.* (PC1, interview 1, lines 11-13)

*‘What differences since starting the group? I think the biggest difference is her confidence as she was so lacking in confidence before’.* (PC2, interview 2, lines 21-23)

*‘ Confidence is the biggest difference as he was so lacking in confidence before’.* (PC4, interview 4, lines 4-5)

Two parents commented that their child maybe appeared too confident following Nurture Group intervention but did not seem unduly concerned:

*‘She is so much more confident...maybe too confident now (laughs)...but we can handle that’.* (PC7, interview 7, lines 12-13)

*‘He lacked in confidence before the nurture group as he wouldn’t do much by himself but things have changed as he is so much more confident now and will go swimming and visit his friends. He can get a bit cheeky and over confident at times and tries things where he fails...but that’s life (smiles)’.*  
(PC8, interview 7, lines 12-15)

### **Sub-theme 1: Completing new tasks**

Several parents commented that their child appeared more outgoing and were more willing to try new things that they would have not attempted before nurture group intervention.

One parent commented that her child had made significant gains in his confidence since starting nurture group provision one term earlier:

*‘ She’s so much more confident since September when he came into this group (long pause) she tries all sorts of things now he wouldn’t have had the confidence to do before...even his Dad has noticed (giggles)’.* (PC3, interview 3, lines 12-15)

Another parent interviewed expressed the view that his daughter had previously shown a reluctance to try new tasks as she was convinced she would fail:

*‘She always said, ‘I can’t do it’ but now she has a go...She was always frightened of answering questions before in case she got it wrong in front of the class.’* (PC4, interview 4, lines 11-13)

This parent noticed that the biggest change in her child after two term’s intervention was an increased level of confidence when faced with new tasks:

*‘I think the biggest change I have saw (sic) since he started in the nurture group is that he is now more confident to try out new things and stuff like....have a go like...he never did that before he just used to sit and cry .....’* (PC5, interview 5, lines 20-23)

## **Sub-theme 2: Independence**

A number of parents commented that as a result of their child's increased confidence they became more independent. Examples of this increased independence was shown by a number of children who wanted to go to school on their own instead of being accompanied by one of their parents/guardians:

*'I always had to take her to school even though she was 7 as she did not want to go by herself. I don't really know why as there was no one bothering her on the way. It was the same until Christmas when she suddenly said 'I want to go by myself like everyone else'. It was such a relief. (Laughs out loud). (PC3, interview 3, lines 6-9)*

*'Before the Nurture Group he couldn't settle first thing in a morning as he was always clinging to me before school. Now he goes in by himself'. (PC9, interview 8, lines 7-10)*

There was evidence from an analysis of the data that some parents commented that their child had an increased desire to complete homework tasks independently without any adult support. This parent was at first reluctant to accept her child did not want her help:

*'He sat in the corner of his room and did his phonics by himself as he didn't need or want my help. At first I was a bit disappointed like as I enjoyed helping him but realised (pause) it was a positive move forward'. (PC10, interview 9, lines 12-14)*

This pupil appeared to enjoy completing homework tasks independently in his bedroom encouraged by the social element of sharing his homework with his



peers in the nurture group:

*'I hated the bloody homework sessions (laughs) as there was always a tantrum (Grimaces) but after starting the nurture group he wanted to do the stuff they sent home by himself in his room as he said he wanted to show his work to the others in the group'. (PCG, interview 6, lines 6-9)*

Two parents of Year 2 pupils aged six commented that the improvements shown could be due to biological maturation but thought the changes were quite sudden as a result of nurture group intervention after two months:

*'She was in Year 2 when she went into the nurture group in January. By April.... I think it was.. she seemed so much more independent and wanted to do things by herself such as answer the phone and visit her friend next door. I thought she should be more independent anyway as she was nearly seven but it happened quickly and I think it was the nurture group that made her more independent'. (PC10, interview 9, lines 6-10)*

*'I thought he would never grow up as he always seemed such a baby. Maybe I made him that way, as he was the youngest. I thought things would get better when he was six but when he went in the nurture group things changed as he seemed grow up quickly and acted like a proper six year old and wanted to do things by himself. I was so relieved I cried'. (PC9, interview 8, lines 18-21)*

### **Sub-theme 3: Concentration**

Improved levels of concentration were discussed by a number of parents who had become aware of this whilst supervising homework tasks. This parent noticed that her child had concentrated on her homework for longer than usual:

*'One night when she was doing her homework in the kitchen that I*

*looked at the time and Emmerdale had just finished and I said you have been doing you homework for nearly half an hour when you usually get fed up after five minutes so I gave her a big hug'. (PC7, interview 6, lines 20-21)*

One parent highlighted 'improved concentration' as a change when asked about any changes in her child since starting nurture group provision:

*'I've notice lots of changes since he started the nurture group....He sticks at jobs longer such as homework 'cos he seems to concentrate better and gets things finished...and seems to enjoy it (laughs). It wasn't like that before as he got bored easy'. (PC6, interview 6, lines 12-15)*

#### **Sub-theme 4: A desire to learn**

Several parents commented that as a result of increased confidence and improved concentration their child had an increased desire to learn. The main evidence of this at home was the child's enthusiasm to complete homework tasks that were mainly related to phonics:

*'He suddenly took an interest and wanted to learn to read'.  
(PC1, interview 1, line 19)*

This parent commented after a few weeks in the nurture group her child wanted to complete the phonics tasks provided as homework by the nurture group staff but she was reluctant to complete homework in mainstream provision:

*'She wouldn't do any homework in Miss X's class but enjoyed the 'Sounds and Letters' homework from the nurture group. I couldn't*

*believe the change as she wants to do the homework and take it into school to show everyone else in the group'. (PC3, interview 3, lines 798)*

Another parent commented on increased levels of confidence and independence in their child and evidence of a sudden desire to learn new things:

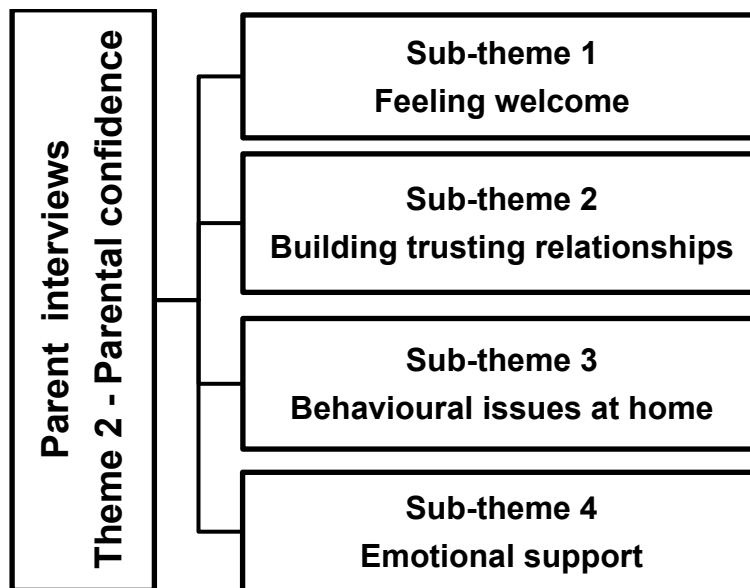
*'He is so much more confident in himself and wants to do things by himself. Suddenly he wants to learn new things and takes an interest in school'. (PC5, interview 5, lines 6-8)*

This parent discussed improved concentration in her child and how it could have led to greater interest in school and a desire to learn:

*'It's funny but she started to concentrate more on her homework after she started the nurture group and we noticed she could sit for longer as her concentration seemed to have improved. She could concentrate for longer as before it was five minutes and that was it. It was a battle. But now she is interested in school and wants to get on and learn more'. (PC7, interview 6, lines 22-24)*

#### **4.4.2 Theme 2: Parental confidence**

The data for this theme is organised into four sub-themes that are now explored in more detail (see Figure 8 for code map).



**Figure 8: Code map of parent interviews – Theme 2**

The majority of parents interviewed expressed the view that their levels of confidence were raised as a result of visiting the nurture group and some cited the positive outcomes in raised confidence by having discussions with the nurture group staff. A small number of parents attended nurture group sessions on a regular basis to support practical activities.

#### **Sub-theme 1: Feeling welcome**

A number of parents commented in their interviews that they now felt more welcome and confident when coming into school to meet the NG staff as some had found meetings with mainstream staff quite challenging. Overall, the parents interviewed made positive comments regarding being welcomed into the nurture group. One parent was nervous about being interviewed and expressed some very negative feelings about his own experiences in both primary and secondary schools:

*‘ I hated school lad (becoming agitated). So it’s taken me years to walk in.... but I’ve done it for our (pupil x) but its OK in here ‘cos they treat me good. I even get a cup of tea (laughs out loud). (PC6, interview 5, lines 18-19)*

Other parents commented that:

*‘ I pop in each week as you are always welcome....I hated going into school before as there was always something wrong’. (PC8, interview 7, lines 7-8 )*

*‘ The open days for parents are great so I can sit with the other parents and play games with the kids’. (PC2, interview 2, line 16)*

### **Sub-theme 2: Building a trusting relationship**

The majority of parents interviewed made positive references regarding the nurture group staff and a number discussed how they had built a trusting relationship with them to enable them to discuss personal family issues relating to their child.

This parent commented on the relationship she had built up with one particular member of the NG staff:

*‘ I can come in here to talk to Miss X any time that suits. She understands me and I can talk openly about my problems and my kids. She’s a Godsend. I know I can trust her, as she is here to help. I can say things I wouldn’t tell anyone else’. (PC8, interview 4, lines 16-18)*

These parents discussed previous negative experiences with mainstream staff:

*‘I hated Miss X as she looked down her nose at us. She didn’t understand me and (pupil x). I hated coming into school. Now it’s getting better as I feel as though they (Nurture Group staff) understand me and we get on well’.*

*‘The main thing is I feel I am not being judged as a bad parent and looked down on by some of the teachers. They (nurture group staff) accept me as I am and treat me with more respect. I am starting to trust them so I can tell them how I really feel’. (PC4, interview 4, lines 18-228)*

### **Sub-theme 3: Supporting Behavioural Issues at Home**

Several parents expressed their concerns about their child’s poor behaviour at home and how they struggled to cope because of a lack of strategies to encourage positive behaviour. These parents expressed their gratitude to the nurture group staff for giving them a range of strategies used in the Nurture Group to try out at home. As a result, some parents expressed the view that they were more confident in dealing with negative behaviour at home following advice from Nurture Group staff.

These parent welcomed advice from nurture group staff regarding concerns they had about their children’s behaviour at home:

*‘I pop in every night to see how he’s got on and Mrs. X (nurture group staff) tells it straight like so I follow her advice. She says I’m too soft and need some rules so I’m working on it’. (PC1, interview 1, lines 23-25)*

*‘I was invited in for the afternoon to see what they did and it was really good. I learnt such a lot about keeping calm and listening... so I have been trying that at home instead of flying off in a rage’ (PC4, interview*

4, lines 16-18)

*‘ After talking to Miss X (nurture Group staff) it helped me a lot ‘cos I thought I am the adult here and she is winding me up something rotten and taking control...And she is the child and I am the parent’. (PC6, interview 5, lines 22-23)*

#### **Sub theme 4: Emotional support**

It became clear that after interviewing the parents that a number welcomed regular discussions with nurture group staff to discuss issues at home that appeared to impact on their child’s behaviour. One parent interviewed commented that she valued the discussions with a particular member of the nurture group staff regarding her problems at home:

*‘ I have a lot of issues at home that get me down so I pop in for a chat with Miss X ... it has really helped me. She is good and listens as she knows the family well and understands my problems. She doesn’t give me advice but gets me to sort it out myself’. (PC4, interview 4, lines 22-25)*

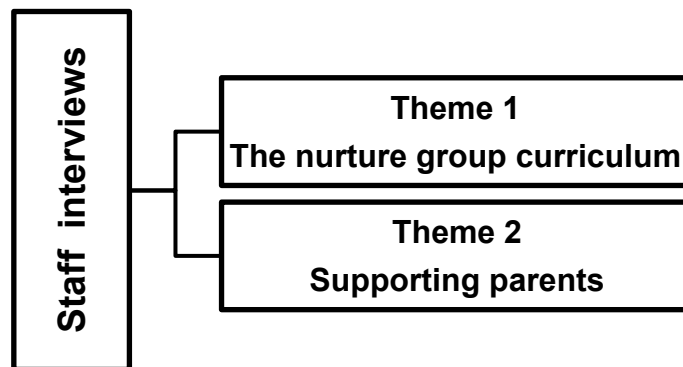
This parent was a regular visitor to the nurture group as a voluntary helper. She commented that discussions with nurture group staff during her visits have helped her deal with challenging situations at home:

*‘ I come in 3 mornings a week and I help with the reading and Snack Time.... It’s good to talk to the staff as they help with problems at home as it’s good to talk to someone away from home’. (PC10, interview 9, lines 16-17)*

#### **4.5 Staff interviews - Themes identified**

Following analysis of the data from interviews with nurture group and

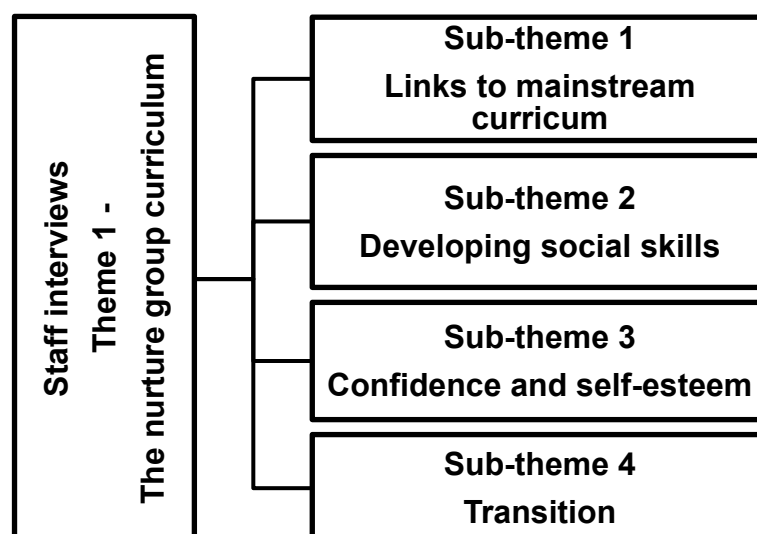
mainstream staff, two themes were identified: the nurture group curriculum and supporting parents. Within each of these themes, further subthemes were identified that will be discussed. Figure 9 shows a code map for the two identified themes following analysis of data.



**Figure 9: Code map of staff interviews – Themes**

#### **4.5.1 Theme 1: The nurture group curriculum**

The data for this theme is organised into five subthemes that are now explored more fully (see Figure 10 for code map).



**Figure 10: Code map of staff interviews – Sub-themes for Theme 1**



The majority of Nurture Group staff interviewed made reference to the importance of the nurture group curriculum as they felt it was paramount in engaging pupils and creating learning opportunities based on the interests of the pupils and any identified targets from the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998).

### **Sub-theme 1 – Links to mainstream curriculum**

All nurture group staff interviewed appeared fully aware of the mainstream curriculum relevant to the pupils in the group and the need to follow current National Curriculum requirements.

*‘We know what they cover in classes as they give us their timetable. We try to match up with this as much as possible so if they are doing a Romans topic we will follow the theme’. (NG1, interview 1, lines 3-5)*

*‘ We discuss with the class teachers which bits of the National Curriculum we will cover and how we will cover it. (NG3, interview 2, lines 6-7)*

There was evidence that the nurture group staff planned the curriculum around the individual needs of each pupil:

*‘We plan the curriculum round the needs of the group. If a number have low self-esteem then we need to build in activities to support this and make them feel better about themselves. This group struggle to share and take turns so we play lots of games where we model how to do this’. (NG4, interview 2, lines 10-12)*

However, there was frustration expressed from two nurture group staff regarding the expectations from mainstream staff that appeared to show a lack of understanding of the principles of planning the nurture group curriculum. There were occasions that mainstream staff expected them to complete mainstream activities that were 'sent' with individual pupils:

*'Sometimes staff who don't understand what we do ....or don't **choose** (emphasised) to understand.. send children with their work to complete in the nurture group. We just ignore it but I will go and have a chat with Mrs X later...to put her right like'. (NG3, interview 2, lines 18-21)*

All staff interviewed expressed the view that they had a higher degree of flexibility compared with mainstream classes regarding planning and adapting the nurture group curriculum to meet the needs of the children as exemplified by this member of the nurture group staff:

*' We have a lot of flexibility in planning the curriculum around the needs of the children and the mood of the group that can change pretty quickly when they get tired in the afternoon. We plan lots of practical activities like cookery, art work, making things...lots of practical things that they enjoy and maybe don't get a chance to do much of in class. We usually plan work around a story theme that lasts for maybe half a term. We have snack time and Circle Time'. (NG4, interview 2, lines 14-19)*

*'Sometimes we just do things on the spur of the moment like the pirate ship that we built after reading a pirate story. The kids loved it...there was paint everywhere. They wouldn't have been able to do that in class'. (NG1, interview 1, lines 8-10,*

All staff commented that in the initial stages in setting up their group they spent a considerable amount of time discussing the implications of the nurture group timetable with staff and which lessons they would 'miss'. Each of the three groups ran both morning and afternoon sessions and the greatest concern for some staff, especially Year 2 and Year 6 staff, was that pupils may miss literacy, numeracy and science lessons. This may be related to the pressures of end of key stage testing:

*" We know some teachers are still not happy about them 'missing' literacy and numeracy lessons even though we spent a lot of time when we set up the group discussing the changes and withdrawals. Maybe some are new staff who don't really understand....so we maybe need to go over it all again...as you just expect everyone to know what we are doing. You've made me think now (laughs). (NG2, interview 1, lines 12-15)*

*'Our group runs each afternoon now so we don't have the problem of them missing their morning lessons in class when we timetabled English and maths each morning. Most children are tired in the afternoon so we go with the flow'. (NG2, interview 1, lines 16-18)*

All mainstream staff discussed the importance of planning the curriculum together and appreciated that the nurture group approach can be different to that of mainstream classes:

*'Children go the nurture group every afternoon as we agreed they would stay in class each morning for literacy and numeracy. So we all need to know what each other are doing. They do follow our planning so they do the same topics... like this term we are doing about the Romans so their room is made*

*into a Roman camp. It looks great and I have pinched some of their ideas. It's fun and the children enjoy it'. (MS2, interview 5, lines 8-12)*

### **Sub-theme 2 - Developing social skills**

All nurture group staff commented on the importance of developing social skills through planned activities based on pupil needs. These activities included Snack Time, Circle Time and a variety of games modelled by nurture group staff if necessary:

*'It is important that we develop social skills that can be missing from home. In Snack Time we try to have a formal dining session where we have a formal snack sitting round a table. We take turns and encourage everyone to say 'please' and thank you'. (NG2, interview 1, lines 5-7)*

*'We build Circle Time into the timetable each day. It is important that we give everyone in the group a chance to listen and take turns. Usually it is after dinnertime as there have usually been issues to sort. (NG5, interview 3, lines 82-85 )*

*'Social skills are important. Some children need help so we plan games into the curriculum so we can model how to take turns and show how to lose and win'. Some struggle with losing ...and winning'. (NG6, interview3, lines 8-10)*

*'I don't have a Circle Time session as the nurture group is one big Circle Time'. (NG3, interview 2, lines 12-13)*

### **Sub-theme 4 –Confidence and Self-esteem**

Three nurture group staff made the link between increased confidence and social interaction with other pupils in the nurture group setting. One member of the nurture group staff made specific reference to one pupil and his

improved social interaction that resulted in an increase in his confidence:

*‘ At first he was very shy and didn’t mingle much with the others. He wasn’t very confident in playing the games and taking part in practical activities. He was a bit of a loner. But things improved. We noticed that after a few weeks in the group that he was more confident and as a result started to share more with others in the group and listened to them in Circle Time’. (NG6, interview 3, lines 77-81)*

One member of the nurture group staff emphasised the importance of encouraging pupil confidence for the pupils in her group and commented how this was supported:

*‘In the small nurture group children are encouraged to have a go and it doesn’t matter if they fail...it’s so important that their contribution is valued even if they get it wrong’. (NG4, interview 2, lines 6-7)*

Another member of the nurture group staff emphasised the small steps that show increased pupil confidence in a practical situation:

*‘ We plan things so we sit with the children and play games together...(pause)...so for example... last week we played Monopoly. ‘Pupil X’ moved the counter by himself but wouldn’t have had the confidence to do that by himself when he came into the group without me moving his counter for him...’ (NG1, interview 1, lines 22-24)*

One member of the nurture group staff raised the question of how pupils saw themselves as learners and thought this was a key area to address and build upon:

*‘Because of the blocks or barriers created by low self confidence and*

*poor self-image many children find it difficult to learn, especially in a class. Nurture groups should take the child back through early stages of learning while building confidence and increasing self-esteem. Once a foundation in learning is established the child can then continue to learn in class enabling the mainstream teacher to escalate the process'. (NG6, interview 3, lines 56-60)*

*' We see so many fail in class as they give up before they even start. I think it's a case of 'well if I don't do it then I can't fail' sort of attitude. We encourage them to have a go and try and sit with them to build their confidence. To be honest sometimes it doesn't really matter what the curriculum area is so long as they have a bit of fun, join in and enjoy it. (NG3, interview 2, lines 25-29)*

It was evident from the data that nurture group staff identified a high number of pupils with low self-esteem that appeared to be increasing each year.

*'All this group are very needy and most seem to have low self-esteem as they do not feel very good about themselves. We try to boost their self-esteem but we must be honest as there's no point in saying things are good when they're not as that would be telling lies and they know we are not being honest and truthful. We try to plan simple interesting things that they will enjoy and succeed and still learn. Some love the gardening so build in gardening tasks everyday in the spring and summer to get them out on the patio and involved. (NG 3, interview 2, lines 29-33)*

*' Everything we do in the group is to help kids be confident, raise their self-esteem and learn. We want them to cope in life and be successful. Many suddenly want to start and learn as something triggers this off. For example last week one boy suddenly read something for the first time.....OMG.....we were all in tears (becoming emotional). (NG3, interview 2, lines 23-27)*

### **Sub-theme 5 - Transition**

Following the analysis of the data it became clear that it was very important that the transition from the nurture group to mainstream class was effective to allow pupils to transfer and develop the skills and knowledge learned in the nurture group environment. Staff identified areas of successful transition and barriers that needed to be overcome. Mainstream staff commented on the importance of effective channels of communication with nurture group staff to support successful pupil transition and welcomed the opportunity to meet with them at regular intervals:

*‘It’s good that we meet for a chat each week and of course we pop in every now and again’* (MS1, interview 5, line 5-7)

*‘We do keep in touch. It’s important to know what each other is doing....for the sake of the children’.* (MS2, interview5, lines 2-3)

Mainstream staff felt positive about the re-integration procedures where a member of the nurture group staff accompanied the pupil in their mainstream classroom in the initial stages of the re-integration process:

*‘It’s good that Mrs X comes into the class with any children who are returning to class full time as some children find it a bit of a shock to the system with so many other children around them’* (MS1, interview 6, lines 13-17)

There was a clear emphasis on the importance on the need to transfer clear rules, routines and expectations from this nurture group staff member to help promote trust:

*‘Children with trust issues return to class with a better understanding of the routines of the day. But they are better equipped to accept change.*

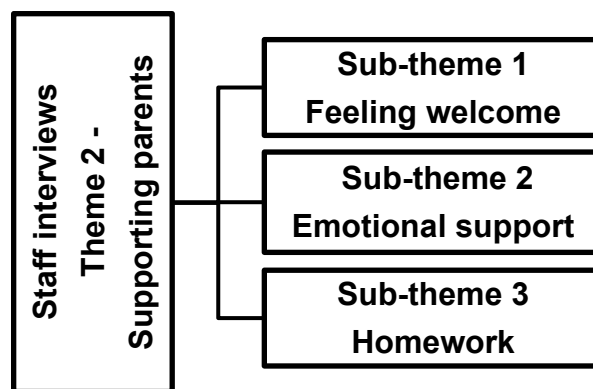
*They will have learned in a safe environment to trust adults who mean what they say'. (NG6, interview 3, lines 216-219)*

Barriers to successful transition back into mainstream provision were identified that included staff training, planning the timetable to identify lessons some pupils would 'miss' in their mainstream class and pupil selection:

*'I'm new to the school as I've only been here one term so I don't really fully understand what the group does apart from the day-to-day stuff. I need some training' (MS1, interview 5, lines 10-11)*

#### **4.5.2 Theme 2: Supporting Parents**

Staff in each of the nurture groups emphasised the need to fully support and involve parents in the learning process, especially those who were regarded as 'hard to reach' by the schools as these parents tended to have very negative experiences of their own childhood education (see Figure 11 for code map showing the sub-themes).



**Figure 11 – Code map of staff interviews - Sub-themes for Theme 2**

#### **Sub Theme 1: Feeling Welcome**

All Nurture Group staff interviewed gave high emphasis to making every



parent welcome through regular events and the opportunity for parents to 'pop in' for a chat. These members of the nurture group staff commented about the events they had organised to involve parents:

*'Many parents do not attend formal events so invite them in for informal chats and a cuppa and are encouraged to help with activities in the group so they are working with their child in a comfy room that's non-threatening'.*

*(NG4, interview 2, lines 23-25)*

*'Those parents who are uncomfortable coming into school get used to the environment. They then get used to school assemblies, parents' meetings and school activities such as sports' days and bingo nights'.*

*(NG1, interview 1, lines 26-28)*

*'We have a monthly celebration morning for parents to join in so we can celebrate the achievements and awards of the month'.* (NG5, interview 3, lines 33-35)

*'Parents are invited to our coffee mornings and last week every parent came'.* (NG5, interview 3, lines 245-246)

*'It is important that we encourage parents to come to the group do we plan activities to involve them. We are planning an arts day with a variety of activities so the parents can work with their child on an activity...it should be fun. Also, it is non-threatening'.* (NG1, interview13, lines 33-35)

A number of staff interviewed said that they encouraged parents to call in at the start of the session or at the end of the day:

*'We want parents to come and see what we do so we welcome them at any time of day'.* (NG2, interview 2, lines 23-25)

*‘Many parents pop in at the end of the day for a chat. They are welcome anytime’. (NG4, interview 2, lines 30-32)*

### **Sub-theme 2: Emotional support**

Every member of the nurture group staff interviewed commented that they spent some of their time supporting the emotional needs of the parents of pupils in their group. Some identified that their nurture group had an ‘open house’ policy. One member of staff welcomed parents to call in for a chat but accepts there are limits to her counselling skills:

*‘She calls in each night for a chat. I’m not a counsellor but I try to listen and support to help her son. She has a lot of personal issues so I have advised her to go for professional help to the relevant person’. (NG4, interview 2, lines 27-29)*

Four staff members commented that sometimes the parents need more emotional support than their children and said that they spent a considerable amount of time listening to parents’ problems but regarded it as part of their role:

*‘This is a very needy group as they have lots of issues to address. But to be honest so have their parents as they are very needy too’. (NG5, interview 3, lines 54-55)*

*‘We spend a lot of time listening to parents who want to offload their problems. We help as best as we can as sometimes there is no one else to listen’. (NG2, interview 1, lines 23-25)*

*‘ When parents pick up their children they stay for a chat. Some have had a bad day so they tell us about it and we listen’. (NG4, interview 23, lines 40-42)*

### **Sub-theme 3: Homework**

There was evidence from the data analysed that a high number of parents were very keen to support the homework given from the Nurture Group and relied on support from nurture group staff to give guidance. The great majority of this homework related to reading and phonics awareness:

*‘We give homework once a week. Usually it’s to do with sounds and letters to support the phonics work in Year 2. Parents are really interested and want to help but need a bit of support in knowing what to do. We are happy for them to pop in on homework night’. (NG6, interview 3, lines 40-44)*

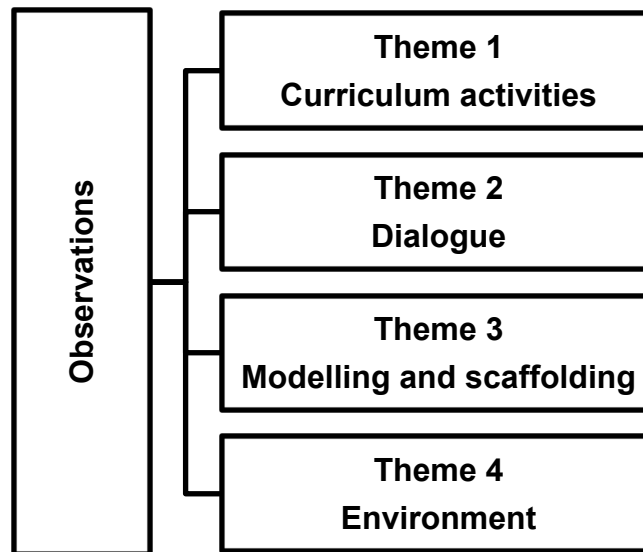
*‘Parents are dead keen to do the homework as this surprised me as I thought they wouldn’t be that interested’. (NG5, interview 3, lines 42-44)*

*‘We tend to give the same homework as the rest of the class (Year 5) ...and it’s often maths. Most parents pop in for help ‘cos they hate maths and say they were no good at it at school. (NG3, interview 2, lines 39-42)*

### **4.6 Observations**

Six observations were completed that comprised one in each of the three nurture groups and one in each of the three mainstream classrooms that included at least one nurture group pupil.

The key themes that emerged from observations in nurture groups and mainstream classrooms are shown in Figure 12.



**Figure 12: Code map of observations**

#### **4.6.1: Curriculum Activities**

There was a marked difference in the range of activities and the classroom management of the activities between the nurture groups and the mainstream classrooms.

All three nurture groups introduced the session with a Circle Time (Mosley, 2003) type activity where all the pupils in the groups sat in a circle with the two adults to review the previous session and try to ensure the pupils were fully familiar with forthcoming session through the use of a visual timetable. The three nurture groups offered a wide range a range of activities that included making Christmas decorations, snack time, play based activities, a range of curriculum activities and listening to a story.

At times pupils in the nurture groups sat at their tables and completed relevant differentiated tasks such as writing or researching on a desktop computer or iPad but the majority of the time was spent on practical tasks with a degree of pupil choice and some freedom built into the classroom management to allow the activities to be modified according to the individual needs of pupils. The older pupils seemed to enjoy being seated at the tables to work and on two occasions the older pupils asked if they could continue their writing instead of moving on to the next planned activity; the staff were happy to allow this request that showed a degree of flexibility in the timetable. Many of the curriculum activities observed were a more creative interpretation of activities regularly carried out in the classroom. For example, in one nurture group a lesson was planned to include the teaching of phonics that involved the group moving the school hall to play a skittles game where they had to hit skittles with a ball and build a range of sounds and words; the pupils clearly enjoyed this experience.

There were other examples of flexibility evident as it was noticeable that as the afternoon sessions progressed some pupils became tired and irritable resulting in them going off-task more readily. To accommodate this the two staff members although sticking rigidly to the planned timetable were very flexible with the timing so it allowed them to shorten sessions and move quickly on to a different activity. Also, one particular child appeared to be very tired during the afternoon session and as a result they fell asleep on the sofa for fifteen minutes and then re-joined the group.

Nurture group pupils seemed to enjoy the snack time (particularly serving the food and washing the dishes), making the Christmas decorations and being given freedom in their choice of activities. The snack time was arranged like a formal dining occasion with all pupils and staff seated around a large table with individual place mats, appropriate cutlery and waiter service. The available activities for pupils to choose from included play based activities where they could dress in role, playing with puppets and a puppet theatre, completing writing tasks, using the computer and general activities that included Lego with a variety of toys and games. The role of the adults in these 'sessions appeared to be that of monitoring and observing rather than that of contributing to the activities or encouraging those involved in solitary play to co-operate with another pupil. Some pupils, mainly younger girls played in pairs in activities centred round the toy kitchen area and when they discussed various tasks such as washing dishes and baking. These sessions tended to last around fifteen to twenty minutes with a number of pupils changing activities on two or three occasions.

There was evidence of a range of how the pupils were grouped as individual and shared collaborative activities that were sometimes supported by the two adults in the group. Examples of various groupings were:

- Individual activities were ICT work and solitary play with toys, puppets and role play in the dressing up corner;
- Paired activities such as playing a board game with a peer or adult and gardening;

- Small group activities such as making Christmas decorations or baking with two peers or one peer and an adult; and
- Whole class activities that included the phonics skittle game, a science experiment to test for non-porous materials and building a Viking longboat.

The nurture group curriculum supported the development of social skills through Circle Time (Mosley, 2003), snack time and the planned curriculum. For example, during the snack time pupils were encouraged to develop social conventions through saying 'please', 'thank you' and taking food orders. Planned activities include a number of games where the adult modelled appropriate behaviour such as turn taking, making eye contact, being a 'good loser' and sharing paint and crayons. There was little evidence of developing social skills in the mainstream classrooms, as it appeared that the adults accepted that social skills such as turn taking and sharing were already in place, especially for the older pupils. The emphasis in the three mainstream classrooms appeared to be on meeting academic targets that were referred to on a number of occasions in each lesson observed.

In the mainstream classrooms the lessons had a more structured and less flexible approach with a clear three-part structure with a whole class introduction, group or individual activities and finally a whole class plenary session; the introduction and plenary sessions were held on the carpeted area. In the mainstream classroom lessons observed, the class teacher led the introductory and plenary sessions with the teaching assistant sitting with

the pupils in a role to help dissipate any poor behaviour. The planning of the whole class introductory session was based on the interactive whiteboard with extensive use of interactive software programmes. These sessions were planned for a 15-minute duration but tended to exceed that. It was noticeable that a number of pupils became very restless towards the end of the session and as a result either the class teacher or TA addressed their off-task behaviour. As a result, some children were moved into a different part of the carpet or were instructed to sit next the TA. The second part of the lesson involved an independent task that tended to be a formal writing based activities where the pupils sat in groups around a table. It was evident in the mainstream environment that some pupils enjoyed the chance to concentrate on a given task for an extended period and needed no further support to produce work that they felt was of a pleasing standard. However, other pupils struggled as they found their task difficult and called for adult support and reassurance.

The plenary sessions were planned for 15 minutes and involved the class listening to either the class teacher or individual pupils who were asked to give feedback on their accomplishments during the lesson and indicate whether they felt their curriculum targets may have been met. One mainstream literacy lesson observed included an opportunity for pupils to talk to a peer during the plenary session to allow pupils to discuss a set question. Also there were question and answer session in two of the sessions observed where the teacher asked the questions and a limited number of pupils answered them. The plenary in the science lesson was of a more practical



nature with demonstrations led by pupil participants. Generally there appeared limited freedom of choice in the mainstream lessons observed, as they appeared to be teacher led. However, in the science lesson observed pupils were given some freedom of choice in the main body of the lessons as paired children freely moved around the classroom to elicit data from other groups of pupils. It was clear by the positive pupil response that they really enjoyed this activity that lasted for around 15 minutes of the lesson. The plenary session in the science lesson also allowed some freedom of choice as it allowed pupils to select an appropriate activity. Apart from group work in the science lesson and talk-partner work in the literacy lesson, pupils in the mainstream lessons tended to work as individuals for the majority of time.

#### **4.6.2 Theme 2: Dialogue**

There appeared to be a significant difference in the opportunities for dialogue between the nurture groups and mainstream settings. In each of the nurture groups observed, there was evidence of a high level of peer-to-peer and adult-to-pupil discussion throughout the sessions. Some of this interaction and discussion was pre-planned through activities such as Circle Time (Mosley, 2003), snack time and activities such as board games and play based activities that encouraged interaction and dialogue between all participants. Other interactions and discussions were not planned and occurred as a natural interaction during activities.

Observations in each of the nurture groups included a Circle Time (Mosley, 2003) introductory session that lasted for 10-15 minutes that reviewed pupils' activities since the last session and gave the pupils an opportunity to raise

any concerns or worries. All pupils were encouraged by the adults to contribute but any pupil who did not want to contribute to the discussions was not pressurised. In each of the three nurture group observations every child made some contribution to the discussion but some tended to dominate; the nurture group staff seemed aware of these pupils and employed strategies to encourage pupils who appeared more reluctant to make some contribution. Also, each nurture group held a snack time where the two adults encouraged the pupils to develop dialogue around the choices of food and drink available and thanking the waiters for their good service. The adults sat at the table with the pupils and tried to create a positive atmosphere where everyone was encouraged to join in the conversation.

Other activities that encouraged dialogue between pupils and adults in the nurture groups included board games such as Monopoly, co-operative activities where pupils worked in pairs and play based activities that were structured by the adults or allowed pupils a free choice of activity.

Interestingly, a number of older KS2 boys enjoyed playing with the puppets and were observed having one-to-one conversations with individual puppets and seemed oblivious to other pupils around them. During the curriculum sessions in the nurture groups, the pupils and two adults were seated around tables and it was noticeable that pupils were conversing with peers and / or adults as they were working. The topics of the conversations did not always relate to the curriculum task but often centred around family issues; this was not discouraged by the adults.

In the mainstream setting there were fewer opportunities provided for peer-to-peer dialogue and even fewer opportunities for adult-to-pupil dialogue. The science lesson offered the most opportunity for peer-to-peer dialogue through paired activities where pupils had to plan questions to ask other groups to completed a data chart. The numeracy lesson provided the least opportunity for peer-to-peer discussion as the only opportunities were the question and answer session led by the teacher where only a very limited number of pupils responded.

Each of the mainstream sessions started with an introductory activity and ended with a plenary session where all pupils were seated on the carpeted area of the classroom. The lesson planning indicated that this was to promote discussion and dialogue between pupils where individuals were paired with a peer to discuss teacher directed questions. Although the planning indicated there would be a 100% pupil response the observations indicated that a significant number of pupils made no contribution to the discussions. Opportunity was offered for pupils to give feedback to the remainder of the class but this opportunity was only taken up by a small number of pupils who felt confident to speak aloud in front of the whole class.

Any peer-to-peer discussion between pupils in the mainstream classes during the independent tasks tended to be suppressed by the teacher, as pupils were told they needed to be quiet and get on with their work. An interesting comparison in one school identified that pupil discussion of football matches and Christmas presents was encouraged in the nurture group whereas in the

mainstream classroom a similar conversation was suppressed as it appeared to hinder the progress of pupil progress.

The observations in the mainstream classrooms identified few opportunities to promote quality dialogue between adults and pupils. An example of this was in a KS2 classroom, where two of the pupils who attended the nurture group were seated on a table with two other pupils. They were completing a literacy activity as an independent task after a whole class introduction that they had not listened to so it had to be explained again by the mainstream class teacher. The teacher returned approximately every 5 minutes and spent 2 minutes with the group as they were not on task and had completed little of the prescribed work. In a period of 30 minutes the teacher spent about 12 minutes with this group and 18 minutes with the rest of the class. At the end of the lesson, this group had still not completed the task as once the teacher had moved away from them they reverted back to their own off-task conversations.

#### **4.6.3: Modelling and Scaffolding**

Observations in the nurture groups provided evidence of a high level of modelling and scaffolding that on the majority of occasions was pre-planned. During the Circle Time (Mosley, 2003) sessions the adults modelled appropriate behaviour, social skills, correct language and encouraged eye contact. Any children who were challenged by the curriculum tasks were supported by reciprocal scaffolding (Holton and Clarke, 2006) where two or more worked collaboratively allowing individuals to learn from the experiences

and knowledge of peers and / or adults.

During the making of the Christmas decorations in one of the nurture groups observed, the adults repeatedly scaffolded the processes of cutting and sticking for those who were reluctant to complete it by themselves; the adults never completed the task by themselves without involving the pupil in the process. On two occasions the two adults in the group modelled appropriate behaviour through an impromptu conversation based on how to address a problem that occurred when two pupils found it difficult to share resources. During the snack time adults modelled how food was eaten and the safe use of cutlery exemplified by buttering the toast with a safe use of the knife.

In the mainstream classroom observations there was evidence that the two adults modelled appropriate communication skills that included listening skills and responses to questions. There were a number of occasions in the science lesson where the two adults independently modelled how to carry out the experimental testing to a number of groups. However, there was no evidence of the two adults working collaboratively to model or scaffold learning experiences as they worked independently of each other. For the majority of time, the role of the teaching assistant in these mainstream lessons appeared to be dealing with off task pupil behaviour rather than modelling or scaffolding the learning process.

#### **4.6.4 Environment**

There were a number of differences between the nurture group and the mainstream environment. The nurture group rooms, as described in section 4.2 were smaller, more colourful and more representative of Early Years provision than the mainstream classrooms. The most significant differences in the two environments were the kitchen and soft furnishings in the nurture group rooms including a sofa that provided a comfortable area for relaxation and focal point for adult led activities that included reading a story to the group where many pupils curled up with a toy or puppet while they listened. As discussed earlier, it also provided somewhere comfortable within the immediate environment for children to rest and sleep if they were tired or unwell. In addition, the sofa was seen as a central meeting place that provided the opportunity for quality dialogue between pupils, their peers and adults. Also, the nurture room environment appeared to offer an emotionally safe environment for some pupils as they openly discussed family issues during the Circle Time (Mosley, 2003) sessions and whilst conversing with peers and adults during the curriculum activities.

#### **4.7 Chapter Summary**

##### **Interviews**

The pupil participants did not appear to be guarded in their answers to the interview questions and provided a valuable range of data showing that young children are capable of meaningful responses. Their responses identified a number of key themes showing that they enjoyed the practical nature of the nurture group curriculum especially the food related activities, play based

learning, having a choice of activities and the spontaneity and fun that the nurture group curriculum offered. However, some older pupils felt they needed work similar to that in their mainstream classes and felt the curriculum in mathematics lacked rigour and challenge. Pupils appeared more confident in completing curriculum tasks and as a result many felt better about themselves and had an improved attitude to school as some pupils expressed their reluctance to attend prior to nurture group intervention. Pupils commented that they valued the co-operative nature of many activities thereby allowing them to interact with peers with some pupils building new friendships. As a result of shared activities, some pupils showed an empathetic response when observing peers struggling with curriculum tasks. All pupils expressed their fondness for the nurture group staff and enjoyed the calm and emotionally safe environment the nurture group room offered.

The parents identified greater levels of confidence in their children and themselves. Parents cited examples of their children being more independent with improved levels of concentration and wanting to complete tasks such as homework by themselves with a number of parents noticing their child had greater motivation and an increased desire to learn. Parents felt very welcome and comfortable when attending the nurture group, especially those few parents who were initially not happy that their child would be attending the group. They enjoyed the activity days provided and felt they had built a trusting relationship with the nurture group staff and were very appreciative of the time spent discussing their personal problems and the high level of emotional support they received. A number of parents commented that

following their child's nurture group intervention they were now more skilled at handling incidents of their child's poor behaviour at home through asking for advice and observing how the staff handled various situations in the nurture room.

The staff discussed the challenges of setting up their nurture group that included the funding, finding an adequate space, setting up the room, timetabling and selecting the pupils. They emphasised the importance of planning the curriculum to allow opportunities for pupils to socialise and build confidence and self-esteem through shared activities. The nurture group staff ensured they modelled appropriate behaviour and scaffold learning by contributing to the activities. Pupil transition to mainstream was a high priority for all staff and regular meetings were held to help ensure continuity of practice. Staff were aware that part of their role was to support parents and make them welcome through inviting them to informal activities and creating an 'open house' for parents. The emotional support given to parents proved challenging at times for nurture group staff, especially as they did not want to take on the role of an untrained counsellor.

## **Observations**

The observations in the nurture groups and mainstream classrooms identified some similarities but a number of differences. Both the nurture groups and mainstream classrooms had developed a positive culture where good behaviour and work was rewarded. Both environments had clear rules displayed on the walls that were referred to during the sessions. In relation to the adult support although the ratio of adults to pupils was very different both



environments had two adults in a teaching or supporting role. Whereas in the nurture groups there was clear evidence that on a number of occasions the two adults worked co-operatively to model and scaffold learning, the adults in the mainstream classrooms worked independently. Interestingly, in the mainstream classrooms the identity of the teacher and TA was clearly defined according to the roles they took in the lessons. However, in the nurture groups there was no clear division of roles so it would have been challenging to identify who was the teacher or the TA.

In relation to the curriculum activities there was a much wider range of practical activities in the nurture group rooms that could be more difficult to manage in the classroom situation. There was clear evidence of joint planning between the nurture group and mainstream staff but the approaches to how similar activities were delivered was very different. This was exemplified by two observed lessons that taught phonics in the nurture group and a year two mainstream classroom. The mainstream classroom approach was planned as a small group activity led by a TA where pupils sat at table and worked with photocopied worksheets and cards identifying letters and sounds whereas the nurture group took a more flexible and creative approach to cover the same content using a skittles game in the school hall that was practical and appeared to be more fun. Planning in both environments covered relevant National Curriculum targets but the nurture group also included a number of scenarios to promote dialogue and develop relevant social skills through activities such as Circle Time (Mosley, 2003), snack time and collaborative activities to promote listening skills, sharing and turn taking.

Although the environments were very different, the key difference was the addition of a sofa in the nurture group rooms that seemed to act like a central social hub for relaxation, conversation and a quiet place to read. Also it was used as a facility for adults to talk with pupils on a one-to-one basis about any incident or poor behaviour that had arisen without having to leave the room, as was the case in the mainstream classroom.

# **Chapter 5**

## **Discussion**

## **5.1 Chapter Overview**

This chapter firstly discusses findings from the previous chapter in relation to the four research questions (5.2) and links these questions to identified research. Implications are then discussed in 5.2.1, 5.2.2, 5.2.3 and 5.2.4. The strengths and limitations for the research include critiques of the sample, the methodology and the approach to analysis (5.3). Implications for further research include implications for pupils, parents, staff and whole school strategic planning (5.4) followed by a conclusion (5.7).

## **5.2 Discussion of analysis**

The current research is based on the central question:

- How do pupil, parent and staff perspectives contribute towards an exploratory study of the curriculum in primary nurture groups?

To answer the central question, the following sub questions will be considered:

RQ1. What are the views of pupils regarding their experiences of the nurture group curriculum?

RQ2. What are the perspectives of parents regarding the nurture group curriculum in relation to the experiences of their child?

RQ3. What are the perspectives and experiences of staff regarding the nurture group curriculum and how it may relate to the mainstream curriculum?

RQ4. How the observations identified any similarities and differences between the curriculum in the nurture groups and mainstream classrooms.

### **5.2.1 RQ1: What are the perceptions and experiences of pupils in relation to the impact of the nurture group curriculum?**

The pupil participants identified three key areas namely the nurture group curriculum, relationships and the nurture group environment.

In relation to the first key area, most pupils enjoyed the engaging curriculum provided by the nurture group, as it appeared to be fun and practical consistent with research by Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001). As a result of the practical and engaging nature of the curriculum, many pupils felt they learned more than in mainstream provision and cited specific examples including gardening, art and design technology and food related activities that was similar to findings found in other research (Kourmoulaki, 2013; Shaver and McClatchy, 2013; and Cooper, Arnold and Boyd, 2001). The food related activities that pupils cited included breakfast, snack time and the baking sessions to prepare for parental curriculum afternoons. A number of pupils commented that there was little opportunity to engage in these types of activity in their mainstream provision. The pupils who said they did not enjoy the mainstream curriculum may have felt it was too rigidly prescribed and too narrow (Sonnet, 2010). There was evidence that some pupils were aware that the current educational experiences in the nurture group were different to that of previous experiences as identified in research by Syrynk (2014).

Many pupils, of all ages and genders, made specific reference to their enjoyment of play related activities that included role-play and their freedom of choice that allowed them to have a more child centred curriculum than

mainstream provision offered. These findings are consistent with research by Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001), Scott and Lee (2009) and Kourmoulaki (2013). It appeared that a number of pupils who enjoyed a free choice of activities played with puppets or construction toys on a parallel level of play where the child plays alongside others but does not interact with them that is typical of a child between two and a half and three years of age (Parten, 1932). Other pupils discussed their visits to the dressing up corner with a friend that can be defined as an associate level of play where the pupils start to interact with others in their play and develop friendships and preferences for playing with some but not all children; they may talk about the activity but own play goals take precedence. This is typical of a child aged three to four years of age (Parten, 1932). This suggests that many pupils are operating at a level of play well below their chronological age so may have been deprived of these early play experiences.

Although many pupils enjoyed the nurture group curriculum, some older pupils felt that specific areas such as numeracy could have been more challenging. This may have been a result of the nurture group curriculum approach appearing to give more emphasis on problem solving and supporting life skills through the practical application of mathematical concepts. This approach contrasts with more formal written methods advised by the National Curriculum (DfE, 2014a) especially in number and place value that the pupils could have been more accustomed to in mainstream provision. Interestingly, the majority of this group of pupils were older key stage 2 (KS2) boys, who also expressed the viewpoint that they enjoyed the practical activities

including the opportunities to dress up in the play corner, play with puppets alongside the spontaneity of being able to make things on the spur of the moment; this suggests that they may have missed these early childhood experiences. There was no clear evidence that any member of staff clarified to pupils the possible differences between the mainstream and nurture group curricular. This raises an area for further investigation based on how pupils' views could be taken into account when planning the nurture group curricula.

Some pupils felt that the nurture group curriculum helped to improve their levels of personal confidence that promoted a greater desire to learn and improved perceptions of themselves as learners as suggested in research by Sanders (2007). This greater desire to learn is highly significant and is described by Bandura (1997, p.195) as 'self-instructed performance', one of the 'modes of induction in performance accomplishments'. Also, there was evidence of this greater desire to learn in the mainstream classroom suggesting that improvements gained in the nurture group provision can be transferable to the mainstream setting. These pupils made reference to their increased levels of confidence in specific skills gained in both the nurture group and out of school activities suggesting that increased levels of confidence gained in the nurture group provision had transferred to the home environment.

The second key area related to the nurture group environment. Pupils were very positive about the nurture group environment that was described as both calm and emotionally safe that supports earlier research by Cooper, Arnold

and Boyd, (2001) and Kourmoulaki (2013). Pupils identified that the nurture group environment was conducive to improved learning that was based on the physical environment of comfortable furnishings that reminded some pupils of the home environment of their Grandparents. It was interesting that no pupil commented that it reminded them of their own home environment. Also, pupils commented that the atmosphere in the nurture group was quiet, calm and relaxing thereby allowing greater levels of concentration to complete work. These findings are consistent with research by Bishop and Swain (2000a); Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001); Kourmoulaki (2013); and Griffiths, Stenner and Hicks (2014).

Some pupils made specific reference to the emotionally safe environment, as identified in research by Kourmoulaki (2013). These pupils made references to being safe from the pressures of the mainstream curriculum and bullying from mainstream peers that relates to the second principle of nurture groups (Nurture Group Network, 2017a). The importance of the environment that include the physical environment of the nurture room and the food related activities that included breakfast and snack time are basic physiological requirements identified by Maslow (1943) as the platform that supports pupil safety, the development of pupil self-esteem and promotion of social needs that may lead to self-actualisation.

The third key area discussed the relationships formed with peers, nurture group staff and developing empathy. Most pupils identified the importance of developing inter-personal relationships with peers and nurture group staff as



identified in research by Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001) and Griffiths, Stenner and Hicks (2014). Some pupils identified that the co-operative activities provided by the nurture group curriculum helped to build stronger relationships with peers and introduce them to new friends, as it was evident that some pupils had found it challenging to make friends with their peers in their mainstream classrooms. This is significant data as it relates to one of the fundamental principles of nurture group provision based on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, Ainsworth et al., 1978).

Pupils cited specific examples of more experienced peers and staff modelling appropriate behaviour that relates to participant modelling, one of the four major sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and the ZPD where pupils reach a higher pedagogical stage through support from a knowledgeable peer or instructor (Vygotsky, 1978). Practicing interpersonal skills through listening to peers had also supported this process as suggested in research by Kourmoulaki (2013). To ensure good peer role models each nurture group invited peer guests at regular intervals to attend curriculum sessions.

All pupils spoke very fondly of the nurture group staff and some pupils identified negative experiences with mainstream staff that supports the findings of Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001), Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) and Syrnyk (2014). The data provided strong evidence that pupils were strengthening their relationships with the adults and peers. This supports the fundamental theoretical nurture group approach, supported by attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth et al., 1978) as identified in research by

Syrnyk (2014) and confirms the importance of the role of the teacher in building positive attachments with pupils who may not have experienced a secure attachment with a significant adult in early childhood (Geddes, 2006).

Finally, there was evidence in the findings of pupils' empathy with their peers through developing friendships whilst participating in mutual curriculum tasks (Bigelow and La Gaipa, 1975). Pupils showed they could tolerate the viewpoint of others and support peers in activities that were identified as challenging defined by Goleman (1995) as cognitive empathy; this is similar to the findings of Kourmoulaki (2013). This level of moral thought was identified in stage 3 of Kohlberg's stages of moral development (Kohlberg, 1976, p.16) that was defined as 'conceptualising role-taking as a deeper, more empathic process where one becomes concerned with the other's feelings'. Selman (1998) comments that this is typical of children aged from 6 to 12 years of age. The SEAL programme (DfCSF, 2005) as discussed in section 2.3.1 encourages pupil self-awareness to support the development of empathy based on the premise that as children become more aware of their own emotions they can begin to recognise them in others.

The current research suggests that there could be a significant link between the high emphasis of mutual curriculum tasks within the planning of the nurture group curriculum that appears to develop friendships resulting in greater peer empathy; this could be an area for further research.

### **5.2.2 RQ2. What are the perspectives of parents regarding the nurture group curriculum in relation to the experiences of their child?**

The main findings relating to parental perceptions identified increased levels of confidence for both pupils and parents. In relation to increased pupil confidence, parents in the current study highlighted that their children were more confident and more independent in a variety of situations, supporting the research by March and Healey (2007) and Sanders (2007). When asked for specific examples of how their child had become more confident parents cited the ability to complete new tasks such as completing homework without adult support, an increased level of independence identified through their child wanting to go to school on their own, greater levels of concentration and an improved perception of themselves as learners. This increased desire to learn that was also identified by the pupils themselves and replicates the finding of research by Sanders (2007). Bandura (1997) discusses the importance of personal mastery that relates to the expectations of self-efficacy.

As identified in earlier research by Scott and Lee (2009), parents were aware of an increase in their child's independence, and cited examples such as completing homework independently and one child being able to go to school on their own. This made one parent's mornings less stressful so she could spend more time getting ready for work and spend more time with younger siblings. Also, it gave the opportunity for this pupil to socialise with their peers and build friendships.

The data from the parents' interviews identified that their children developed greater independence through completing nurture group homework to extend their reading skills that was not evident from earlier mainstream homework; these findings are similar to those of Scott and Lee (2009). A number of parents made reference to the homework set by the nurture group staff and it was apparent they held this in high regard and they supported their child in the completion of the homework tasks. Their reasoning behind this high level of interest and support was based on their own negative experiences of primary school, their own learning difficulties and a lack of encouragement from their own parents; this is similar to the research by Kourmoulaki (2013). Therefore, it is important to emphasise that some parents wanted to give their children the positive support they had never experienced. Although many parents stated they had little knowledge of how to effectively support their child prior to nurture group intervention, they were complimentary regarding the advice given from nurture group staff that increased their levels of confidence and knowledge relating their ability to support homework tasks. In addition they increased their pedagogical expertise through, for example, observing staff model reading with a pupil, and taking part in curriculum activities in the nurture group that is consistent with research by Kirkbride (2014) and exemplifies the importance of personal mastery that relates to the expectations of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

In relation to increased parental confidence, parents valued the open door policy as a positive model of parental engagement that allowed them to meet nurture group staff on an informal basis to discuss their personal issues and

pertinent issues relating to their child also identified in the research by Taylor and Gulliford (2011). Parents felt welcomed into the nurture group environment and enjoyed the informal curriculum related events they attended that also led to their increased understanding of the nurture group principles and practice that supports the research by Syrnyk (2014) but contradicts the research by Kirkbride (2014) who found that in general parents had little understanding of nurture group principles and practice. Parents commented that the practical and emotional support from the nurture group staff was a positive experience and warmly welcomed suggesting that relationships had been formed in order for parents to be accepting of the support. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) comment that parental feelings can be a positive indicator of their involvement.

As a result of attending informal events in the nurture group environment, many parents felt they had built a trusting relationship with the nurture group staff as reflected in the research by Garner and Thomas (2011) and Kourmoulaki (2013) who found that nurture group practitioners were at the heart of these groups. As a result some parents felt that they were able to discuss personal issues with nurture group staff who offered emotional support. Some parents felt better able to address their child's poor behaviour at home that appears to be as a result of them observing how staff dealt with any behavioural issues in the nurture group as identified in research conducted by Scott and Lee (2009).

### **5.2.3 RQ3. What are the perspectives and experiences of staff regarding the nurture group curriculum and how it may relate to the mainstream curriculum?**

The staff in all nurture groups appeared aware of the need to consult stakeholders before setting up the group as identified by Cooper and Tiknaz; 2005 but there appears to have been no communication with the pupils in the initial stages of setting up the group as the pupils had little idea of the reason why they were selected to attend. In all three schools, nurture group staff attended initial meetings with parents that contrasts with the approach in research by Taylor and Gulliford (2011) where the class teacher, head teacher or special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo) attended the initial meetings. Both mainstream and nurture group staff felt this initial meeting with parents was very important in starting to build positive relationships with some parents who had proved difficult to communicate with in the past. Two barriers identified during initial discussions with mainstream staff showed that class teachers were worried that pupils would miss key lessons and secondly the selection of pupils as discussed in research by Shaver and McClatchey (2013). As a result, all three nurture groups run in the afternoons to allow pupils to access mainstream literacy and numeracy lessons each day.

Nurture group staff felt the nurture group was an inclusive environment as it gave pupils more opportunities to access the curriculum than mainstream provision provided and how it was based on building pupil self-esteem, raising pupil confidence, improved social interaction and developing social skills. These findings are consistent with research by Kourmoulaki (2013). The

importance of a differentiated curriculum to support the individual interests and identified social and emotional needs of all pupils was identified by nurture group staff who were also aware that the curriculum provided in the nurture group needed to support National Curriculum statutory requirements. The supports the first principle of nurture groups based on the premise that children's learning needs to be understood developmentally (Nurture Group Network, 2017a). Clarity and continuity of planning was achieved through regular meetings with mainstream colleagues.

It was clear from discussions with nurture group staff that they were aware of the stages of development of individual children and emphasised the importance of planning relevant curriculum activities to encourage some pupils to develop their play skills towards co-operative play that is appropriate for a child aged four years to beyond six years (Parten, 1932). Nurture group staff commented that they differentiated types of play dependent on the role they planned to take. In many of the play based activities the nurture group staff had minimal or no control (Wood and Cook, 2009) allowing pupils complete freedom of choice, as their role was more of a facilitator focusing on observing and making comments (Boxall, 2002).

However, in planned play activities they encouraged relevant pupils who were operating at a level below their chronological age to move towards a higher level of play that matched their chronological age (Parten, 1932) in order to develop their social interaction. This could have prepared these children for reintegration into mainstream provision to support confident and successful

interaction with others in a group activity.

Nurture group staff felt it was important that the two adults could model appropriate behaviour and scaffold pedagogy through shared and co-operative activities that could promote inter-personal relationships between pupils. This support through appropriate modelling and scaffolding was identified at the planning stage. When planning the nurture group curriculum staff appeared fully aware of the relevance of scaffolding pupil learning so relevant activities were planned to incorporate this role. Scaffolding in the nurture group is defined as reciprocal scaffolding (Holton and Clark, 2006), where two or more pupils and / or adults work collaboratively allowing individuals to learn from more experienced peers or adults.

Successful transition to mainstream provision was of high priority to nurture group staff and each school had a clear transition plan that involved all relevant staff. This supports the sixth principle of nurture groups (Nurture Group Network, 2017a). Although longstanding mainstream staff were fully familiar with transitional arrangements one mainstream teacher new to the school was not aware of any school policy relating to transition from the nurture group, highlighting the need for regular staff training and updates.

Nurture Group staff felt they offered a high level of support to parents to help address both pupil and emotional needs of their parents through creating a welcoming environment and an 'open door' approach so they were available without appointment for parents to visit and discuss any problems they may



have as identified in research by Taylor and Gulliford (2011). Nurture group staff identified various areas of parental concern that included behaviour management at home, homework and their personal circumstances. Although nurture group staff accepted it was part of their role some commented they were not trained counsellors but did their best to listen to parents' problems and direct them to the relevant professional help if they felt this was necessary. However they found this part of their role particularly emotionally draining, especially at the end of a challenging day as found in other research by Kirkbride (2014).

Nurture group staff felt that their model of parental engagement through informal events such as shared curriculum activities and shared snack time held in the nurture room was effective in increasing parental involvement, especially for the few parents who had initial concerns about their child attending the group as discussed in research by Shaver and McClatchey (2013) and Kirkbride (2014). Mainstream staff generally welcomed the nurture group initiative and identified evidence of a range of positive outcomes following nurture group intervention that included improved listening skills and improved social skills through pupils' increased ability to share and take turns. In addition, following nurture group intervention there was evidence that pupils showed greater motivation with increased positive perceptions of themselves as learners supporting the research by Sanders (2007).

#### **5.2.4 RQ4. How the observations identified any similarities and differences between the curriculum in the nurture groups and mainstream classrooms.**

The observations in the nurture groups and mainstream classrooms identified key areas namely curriculum activities, dialogue, modelling, scaffolding and the environment.

In relation to the first key area, most pupils enjoyed the practical nature of the curriculum activities as they found them fun as identified in research conducted by Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001) and Sloan et al. (2016). Pupils of all ages particularly enjoyed food related activities such as snack time that was similar to findings found in other research (Cooper, Arnold and Boyd, 2001; Kourmoulaki, 2013; and Shaver and McClatchey, 2013). There was less evidence of the practical nature of activities in the mainstream classrooms apart from the science lesson. This could suggest that practical activities are more difficult to manage in a whole classroom situation yet even the small groups activities observed in the mainstream classroom were quite 'formal' with pupils seated around a table for the whole session. By basing the mainstream planning solely on the National Curriculum (2014a) requirements their curriculum may have become too rigidly prescribed and too narrow (Sonnet, 2010).

The observations identified that the pupils of all ages enjoyed the freedom of choice offered and any play related activities built into the timetable that allowed them to have a more child centred curriculum similar to that offered in

Early Years provision. This is consistent with research by Scott and Lee (2009) and Kourmoulaki (2013).

In relation to the developmental ages of pupils in the play based activities observed, there was evidence that older KS2 pupils enjoyed playing with construction kits, toy cars and puppets at a 'parallel level' of play where these pupils played alongside others but did not interact with them (Parten 1932) that is typical behaviour of a child around three years of age that is well below the chronological age of the pupils observed. In addition, there were a number of examples of 'solitary play' typical of a child two years of age or below and some 'associate play' (Parten, 1932) in the dressing up corner where pupils, mainly younger girls, started to interact with others and developed preferences for playing with some but not all children. There were fewer examples of 'co-operative play' typical of a child between four and six years of age where children play together with assigned roles and agreed themes (Parten, 1932).

Many children in nurture groups are at the parallel stage of development appearing happy to play with others but do not interact with them (Bennathan and Boxall, 1996). Piaget (1951) also discusses parallel play in the early stages of the preoperational stage of development that is defined as children playing in the same room as other children but they play next to others rather than with them. However, the 'parallel' stage of play is the expected stage in development of a child up to three years of age yet many children up to the age of 11 within nurture group provision have not yet progressed beyond this

stage of development. A key aim of the nurture group curriculum is that social and emotional needs of individual pupils can be addressed through a modified curriculum based on their developmental age rather than their chronological age (Boxall, 2002). This modified curriculum needs to consider how to develop the social skills of pupils aged 6 – 11 who are still operating at a 'parallel' level of play type and extend this to the 'cooperative' level (Parten, 1932).

This suggests that many pupils are operating at a level of play well below their chronological age so may have been deprived of these early play experiences emphasising the need to offer a modified curriculum based on the developmental needs of pupils (Lucas, Insley and Buckland, 2016) that forms the basis of the first principle of nurture groups (Nurture Group Network, 2017a). Even though the development of social skills was built into some curriculum activities it was noticeable that the role of the adults in the play based activities was to observe and monitor the play activities and not use the play to develop social rules (Vygotsky, 1978) or scaffold the learning process. This supports the view of Wood and Cook (2009) who argued that play should have no or minimal control. Interestingly, in the mainstream classrooms, even for the younger children, there was no opportunity for any play related activities or little choice offered in a highly prescribed curriculum.

There was evidence of many opportunities within the nurture group curriculum that promoted dialogue between adults and pupils and peer-to-peer conversations. Mercer (2009) emphasises the importance of classroom

dialogue and comments that linguistic ethnographers commonly emphasise that language and social life are linked and raises concerns about the lack of social interaction that some children experience at home. This supports a premise of the early groups in the 1960s that stated that an appropriate curriculum for nurture groups needed to emphasise the importance of language and communication (Boxall, 2002). This is evident in the fourth principle of nurture groups (Nurture Group Network, 2017a).

Some of these opportunities for dialogue such as Circle Time (Mosley, 2003) and snack time were pre-planned but the majority of conversations occurred naturally during curriculum activities. There was some evidence of planning activities to promote dialogue in the mainstream classrooms such as 'talk partners' and group tasks in the science lesson but as the majority of activities were on an individual basis there was little opportunity to converse with a peer. Nurture snack time where children and adults sit around a table provided a relaxed social occasion to develop self-expression through conversation. (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007). This allowed children to discuss a variety of issues that included family circumstances, hobbies, mainstream classes and friendships that appeared to be a form of therapeutic intervention. This form of dining occasion may not be familiar for a number of children (Ingram, 1993) therefore it important time is built into the curriculum so relevant skills can be taught and create a forum for open discussion. A key area of contrast between the nurture group and mainstream environments was the interpretation of dialogue by relevant staff as conversation whilst completing curriculum tasks was encouraged by nurture group staff but not by

the mainstream staff as they felt this inhibited the learning process.

The roles of the adults varied. In the nurture group the adults worked both independently and co-operatively in teaching, facilitating, modelling and scaffolding roles. The nurture group adults planned the work together and during the observations it was not clear who was the teacher and who was the TA. The roles in the mainstream classroom were very different as the teacher planned and led all the lessons with the TA taking a more subservient role. In the classroom both worked independently and apart from the science lesson there was little evidence of any modelling or scaffolding of the learning process. One of the fundamental features of the 'classic' nurture group provision (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007) is that two adults model appropriate behaviour and scaffold learning. The scaffolding observed in the nurture group observations is defined as reciprocal scaffolding (Holton and Clarke, 2006) where the two adults worked collaboratively with one or more pupils in activities such as snack time and playing various games. In the mainstream classroom there was no collaborative scaffolding evident but there was evidence of 'soft scaffolding' (Simons and Klein, 2007) where both the teacher and TA circulated the classroom and talked to some pupils, mainly answering questions and providing constructive feedback. In the nurture groups observed there was evidence of 'hard scaffolding' (Saye and Brush, 2002) as challenging learning tasks were identified in the planning stage allowing curriculum activities to be appropriately based on identified challenges.

The final theme identified from the observations related to the environment.

Boxall (2002, p.36) when setting up the early nurture groups in the 1960s advised that the room needs to provide 'a nurturing ambience ...so the pupils and staff feel sufficiently relaxed and calm ...with sufficient space for free movement and play'. Lucas, Insley and Buckland (2006) developed clear criteria for nurture group provision (see Tables 6,11 and 16) that were met by all three nurture groups visited. The two most noticeable differences between the nurture group and classroom environment were the kitchen area and the comfortable seating that included a sofa and cushions. The nurture group environments appeared small, calm, relaxing and 'homely' and were less curriculum driven than mainstream provision that supports earlier research by Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001) and Kourmoulaki (2013). The physical environment and the food related activities can be defined as basic physiological requirements identified by Maslow (1943) as a basis for meeting other needs including safety needs, self-esteem needs and social needs. The second principle of nurture groups (Nurture Group Network, 2017a) identifies that the classroom needs to offer a safe base; the evidence suggests that pupils felt emotionally safe as they had built trusting relationships with the adults and were happy to discuss their home life and family issues during the conversations.

#### **5.2.5 Drawing the themes together**

Overall, there was considerable overlap between the identified themes from the interviews pupils, parents and staff but two key areas emerged namely increased confidence in both pupils and parents and building relationships.

The first key area that emerged was that of increased levels of confidence of pupils that was identified by pupil, parent and staff participants. Pupils expressed the view that they were more confident in completing a variety of tasks in school and at home that included handwriting, drawing, writing, playing games and attending swimming sessions. It appeared that pupils enjoyed the nurture group curriculum, as it was fun and practical supporting research by Cooper and Boyd (2001). In addition it helped improve levels of personal confidence for a number of pupils that promoted a greater desire to learn defined as 'self-instructed performance' (Bandura, 1997, p.195) and improved perceptions of themselves as learners. Interviews with parents identified four areas of increased pupil confidence namely the ability to complete new tasks, greater independence, higher levels of concentration and finally a greater desire to learn as suggested by Sanders (2007).

In relation to increased pupil ability in completing new tasks many parents cited that their children appeared more confident in completing homework activities from the nurture groups as opposed to homework tasks from mainstream provision that supports research by March and Healey (2007), Sanders (2007) and Scott and Lee (2009). This increase in levels of pupil confidence in homework tasks led to a greater level of parental involvement resulting in parents feeling more confident in their ability to support their child's academic progress and generated greater interest in what was being taught in the nurture group. Data gathered from parents that identified that increased pupil confidence led to greater independence in a range of activities out of school that included going swimming with friends and walking to school by themselves that had a noticeable impact on one parent who felt more



relaxed in the morning resulting in her spending more quality time with younger siblings.

Data from nurture group staff face-to-face interviews cited a number of examples of pupils' increased confidence through improved social interaction that was linked to raised self-esteem. A number of nurture group staff discussed examples of pupils who initially struggled to interact with other pupils in the group and as a result found it challenging to form friendships; their data showed that there was evidence of improved levels of social interaction that led to increased pupil confidence. This suggests that there may be a connection between social interaction and pupil confidence that may warrant further investigation into how pupils felt about their ability to form meaningful relationships with peers. Nurture group staff discussed the relationship between pupil confidence, raised self-esteem and learning citing one particular pupil who appeared very shy when he started the group and didn't seem to have any friends in his class or know how to play with others or take turns. The strategy of playing games with one or two peers encouraged him to share and interact and slowly he seemed to interact better with the group and talk more. As a result he then became more confident in completing work on his own and seemed to feel better about himself as he wanted to do things that he refused to do before. A number of parents discussed the relationship between their child's improved level of concentration, how it could have led to a greater interest in school and a greater desire for their child to learn as discussed by Sanders (2007).

In addition to pupils feeling more confident their parents also felt more confident in their ability to support homework activities, deal with their child's poor behaviour at home and support the nurture group provision through voluntary support. The parents attributed this increased level of personal confidence and empowerment to their attendance at social and curriculum based events in the nurture group that they described as non-threatening allowing them to observe how staff dealt with poor pupil behaviour and learning opportunities. A common theme from parental data was a number of parents had negative experiences of their own primary education so initially felt very reluctant to visit school and did not attend any parents' evening when their child was in a mainstream class that is similar to the research by Kourmoulaki (2013). However, they felt more confident in attending activities the nurture group provided as they felt welcome and the meetings were non-threatening with a practical basis where they could interact with their child, other children and their parents. Following this intervention, two parents volunteered support nurture group sessions at regular intervals.

Building relationships was another key theme that was identified by all participants that relates to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1951). Pupils identified that they had built relationships with both peers and adults through the shared and co-operative activities provided by the nurture group curriculum. The nurture group staff said that it was important to plan a range of activities to encourage cooperation and to develop social skills. Some pupils, who appeared to have struggled to form lasting relationships with peers in the mainstream setting cited examples of forming new friendships in the nurture

group. One pupil identified the reasons for an increase in her acceptance within the group was due to her reduction in angry outbursts that she felt had alienated her to possible friendships within her mainstream setting. There was clear evidence in the observations of a range of planned curriculum activities that encouraged pupils to work co-operatively with a peer or as part of a small group that may have encouraged friendships to develop. Most pupils interviewed spoke very highly of the nurture group staff and the support they were given. There was evidence in the interview data that pupils had bonded with nurture group staff and had begun to build trusting relationships. The observations supported this and it appeared that the pupils had built up valued and trusting relationships with at least one of the two adults in each group.

The majority of parents interviewed made positive references regarding the nurture group staff as they felt well supported and had also built trusting relationships that enabled them to visit at regular intervals to discuss any problems they may have had that related to their child or their own personal issues as discussed by Taylor and Gulliford (2011). As a result they welcomed advice to deal with practical issues such as their child's challenging behaviour at home and the best way to support homework activities. A number of parents felt the nurture group staff offered emotional support by listening to personal concerns. The nurture group staff said a key priority was to make parents feel welcome and had invited them to a number of events that they felt were non-threatening and proved to be popular with parents and well attended.

### **5.3 Strengths and limitations of the research**

Measures to support the quality of the current research were discussed in Chapter Three (see section 3.10). This section will identify the strengths and limitations of the research that relate to sample size, data collection and analysis of data.

#### **5.3.1 Critique of the sample**

Although the sample size in the current research was small the aim of the research was to explore the experiences of the participants so it would be difficult to generalise the results to other nurture groups as the findings are based on the specific nature of the nurture groups included in the study. However, further investigation of these findings may be carried out through a large-scale quantitative research project or a multiple site small scale qualitative study in a number of LAs.

All the pupils interviewed attended nurture group provision and ranged from year 2 (Y2) pupils to year 6 (Y6) pupils covering a wide age range of pupils within the primary sector. There were clear selection criteria for schools within the LA and pupils. The selection of parents and staff was based on a combination of voluntary participation approaches, namely purposive sampling (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and snowball sampling (Robson, 2002). There was a high percentage of parents who agreed to take part in the research; in one school this figure was 85% of parents who had pupils in the present group. This could be due to the strong relationships with parents that nurture group staff had built up since the onset of each group and the nurture

group staff encouraging parents to take part in the study. However, this does not support previous research by Garner and Thomas (2011) that commented that parents of nurture group pupils were difficult to access. The staff participants interviewed varied and included teachers, learning mentors and teaching assistants to help ensure a broad representation of viewpoints.

### **5.3.2 Critique of the methodology**

The main limitation of the current study is the small sample size. Also, it may be difficult to fully replicate the study as the findings are based on the specific nature of the nurture groups included in the study. These specific factors are the length of time the nurture groups have been running, the amount of time the school spent in familiarising parents and staff with the principles of nurture group provision and the geographical location of the nurture groups situated within an area of high social deprivation in the North of England. Also, the chosen method of transcribing the data for numerous face-to-face interviews and observations may not be appropriate for other researchers who may choose a different and less time consuming approach to obtaining their data. To adhere to each school's safeguarding policy and help ensure that each child felt comfortable during the interview process it was agreed that at least one member of the nurture group staff would be present in the room when pupils were interviewed. Although the questions did not directly ask the pupils their opinions on the nurture group or any of the nurture group staff, it could be argued their responses may have been more positive when a member of the nurture group staff was present. Pre-interview discussions with nurture group staff identified a number of pupils who may be uncomfortable with the

interview process therefore this approach was chosen to ensure that all pupils felt relaxed during the interviews. To help pupils and parents feel more comfortable during the interview process, the interviewer visited each of the schools on a pilot visit (see section 3.5) prior to the interviews to help pupils to become to be familiar with his presence within their group.

### **5.3.3 Critique of approach to analysis**

There have been criticisms of thematic analysis for lacking clear definition (Holloway and Todres, 2003). Astride-Stirling (2001) comments that the analysis stages are blurred and lacking in validity, allowing researchers to select extracts that would support themes the researcher would like to see or those that were expected. To ensure rigour and consistency in the thematic analysis process Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-staged systematic framework was used that included a checklist of criteria (see Table 5) to support the identification, analysis and reporting of patterns within the data. Throughout the process, an element of reflexivity was maintained that critically reflected on any influences the constructivist researcher may have upon the research process. Therefore it was important for the researcher to acknowledge beliefs and experiences (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006) and be fully aware of any personal bias to the research process.

### **5.4 Implications for future research**

Guest (2012) commented that an exploratory analysis is often used to generate a hypothesis for future research. The findings in the current study give a picture of the impact of primary nurture group provision on the

curriculum but there is the potential for future research to be carried out that is based on larger samples to allow further exploration of the issues raised.

#### **5.4.1 Implications for pupils**

As discussed in section 2.2.2 the current study gives high emphasis to the 'pupil voice' in relation to pupil participation and active involvement in school based decision-making (Flutter, 2007). However, the current research provides little evidence to show that pupils were made aware of the reasons behind their transition from mainstream classrooms to nurture group provision. There is clear evidence that their parents were consulted alongside their mainstream teacher and this may have been filtered down to the pupil through related discussion. However, there was no evidence that staff or parents discussed the possible different approaches to the curriculum before pupils joined the nurture groups that may have resulted in improved pupil understanding of the issue. Further investigation could explore the consultation processes with pupils and the responses of pupils who were selected to attend nurture group provision and the responses of the pupils who were not selected.

#### **5.4.2 Implications for parents**

The current research emphasises the importance of consulting parents and promoting equal collaboration that is supported by the research of Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005). Power and Clark (2001) discuss the consequences of parents lacking a voice that may result in decreased communication and engagement in school activities. Pena (2000) expresses the view that parents

should be given the opportunity to ask questions, express their views and feel as though these views have been acknowledged. The current study encouraged parental participation through listening to their viewpoints in the face-to-face interviews and there is evidence from the collected data that the three nurture groups also give parents a voice through their policies to welcome parents and listen to and act upon their viewpoints.

The findings showed that parents felt welcome attending informal social occasions in the nurture group environment and that they valued the personal support received from nurture group staff. This appeared to empower some of the parents and as a result they felt they had a better understanding of the principles and practice of nurture groups resulting in increased involvement in nurture group and increased confidence in dealing with their child's behavioural issues at home. This appears to be a successful model of parental involvement that is worthy of further investigation.

#### **5.4.3 Implications for nurture group staff**

Based on the data collected, nurture group staff must be made fully aware of the importance of their pivotal role in the success of nurture group provision. Findings show that this pivotal role is complex based on a number of factors such as supporting the social and emotional needs of pupils through the planning and delivering of an enjoyable curriculum based on the developmental needs of pupils in addition to supporting the emotional needs of parents whose children attend the provision.



There was clear evidence from the interviews with both pupils and parents that nurture group staff were held in high regard. This was based on evidence from the pupils that the nurture group staff had built strong relationships with them through the numerous opportunities available for pupil/adult dialogue. These opportunities appear to have been provided by the planned curriculum based on a range of co-operative activities including snack time and Circle Time (Mosley, 2003). The findings indicated that in one of the nurture groups a particularly strong relationship had been built with parents through a high level of parental involvement that included inviting parents / caregivers to regular informal curriculum events. These proved to be well attended and enjoyed by both pupils and their parents / caregivers.

With regard to the curriculum, the findings highlighted the importance of the flexibility of the nurture group curriculum and the importance of communication with mainstream colleagues to ensure continuity and progression. The nurture group curriculum provided an enjoyable experience for most pupils who cited the food based and play based activities as being particularly memorable. The findings also highlighted the importance of the roles the two nurture group staff took in relation to modelling learning that was generally pre-planned and the scaffolding of learning through a range of shared and co-operative activities.

The nurture group staff interviewed provided an open house policy to support parents, the merits of which are discussed in research by Taylor and Gulliford (2011). This open house policy, although much appreciated by parents,

appeared to be an emotionally draining aspect of the role of the nurture group staff. Therefore, to ensure the wellbeing of nurture group staff, further investigations may consider how they can best support parents on a daily basis to ensure they do not become overburdened in a challenging role.

An area of further research could investigate how pupils could be further involved in the process of setting up the nurture groups and planning an appropriate curriculum. There is evidence from the current study that although parents and mainstream staff were informed regarding pupil selection there was no discussion with pupils to support their transition. A second area could investigate how the principles of the nurture group curriculum could be applied to a mainstream setting taking account of the challenges this may bring in respect of groups sizes, staffing levels and the restrictions of the National Curriculum (DfE, 2004a).

#### **5.4.4 Implications for schools**

Nurture groups need to be supported at a whole school level by the head teacher and other senior management, governors and all members of the school staff including lunchtime supervisors. Schools setting up new nurture groups need to consider in their strategic planning, the amount of time needed after staff training to fully involve all stakeholders, especially pupils, to ensure they are fully familiar with the principles and practice of nurture group provision before the group begins. Also, it is important that staff training is carried out at regular intervals to ensure newly appointed members of staff are fully aware of the principles and practice of nurture group provision. There

appears to be a wide variance of support given by local and national providers. Unfortunately, due to budgetary restrictions, some LAs are now unable to give any support to nurture groups so staff tend to rely on local intelligence or social media to communicate with colleagues. Regarding the primary curriculum, whole school planning could give greater consideration to the approach taken by nurture group practitioners in trying to ensure the curriculum is enjoyable, appropriate for pupils' developmental age with greater emphasis given to the specific interests of the individual pupils.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This research aimed to explore the curriculum in primary school nurture groups from a pupil, parent and practitioner perspective. There is a wide range of evidence to suggest that primary nurture groups are a positive form of intervention in supporting primary aged pupils with SEBD (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007; Reynolds, MacKay and Kearney, 2009; Seth-Smith et al., 2010; Sloan et al., 2016). However, these studies have tended to focus upon children's measured SEBD outcomes with little research to date that identifies the reasons why primary nurture groups appear to be effective in supporting pupils with SEMH, resulting in insufficient research to help practitioners develop their practice, the benefits of which could be transferred to pupils in nurture groups and their parents.

Analysis indicated that the nurture group curriculum is different to that of mainstream provision, as it appears to be more flexible and takes greater account of identified social and emotional needs through the Boxall Profile

(Bennathan and Boxall, 1998) and the importantly takes account of pupil interests. The planning of the nurture group curriculum emphasises the importance of building communication, language and relevant skills through play based and co-operative activities that allow children to learn at their developmental not chronological age. Analysis also indicated that parents of children attending nurture group provision also benefitted through increased involvement in the curriculum and empowerment that encouraged a number of parents to support the provision on a regular basis. It appears that nurture groups can give pupils the necessary skills to influence their academic progress (Sloan et al., 2016) so it is hoped that the current research may inform practitioners of these skills thereby adding a positive influence to their curriculum planning that may influence mainstream practice and pupil academic achievement.

Finally, in relation to recent concerns regarding increasing levels of mental health issues in young people (The Mental Health Foundation, 2017) it is highly relevant that the current research identifies strategies that may encourage pupils to enjoy and benefit from the curriculum as this may help address the most common form of permanent exclusion in primary schools caused by persistent disruptive behaviour in mainstream classrooms (DfE, 2016).

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# Appendices

# **Appendix 1**

## **Appendix 1: Head teacher information letter**

Dear (Head teacher's name),

My name is John Kirk and I am currently studying for a doctorate at the Open University. I enclose information about the aims of the study and the role of participants who agree to take part.

The aims of my research is to explore the experiences of pupils, their parents/guardians, nurture group staff and mainstream practitioners in relation to the distinctive features of the nurture group curriculum and how it may differ to the curriculum planned in mainstream classrooms.

Participants who agree to be part of this research project will be interviewed about their experiences of the nurture group curriculum. All the data collected will be confidential as the names of the school, the pupils, the parents/guardian and school staff will be anonymous to protect their identity. All information provided during the study will be confidential and stored in a secure location and destroyed once the research has been completed.

If you agree to your school taking part in this research, an information letter and consent form will be provided for relevant pupils, parents and teachers outlining the purpose of the study and what is expected of each participant. All participants will be offered an opportunity to meet with me in person to discuss the research and to ask any further questions they may have about their involvement. The interviews will be recorded and remain confidential. The only circumstance in which I would break this confidentiality would be if the participant tells me something that means either them or somebody else is in danger.

If you choose to take part in this study and change your mind you are free to withdraw at any time during data collection. Should you choose to withdraw you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason.

If you give your permission for the school to participate in this research please return the consent form in the SAE. If you have any queries please contact me on the contact information provided below.

I look forward to hearing from you.

John Kirk

Contact details:

# **Appendix 2**

## **Appendix 2: Head teacher consent form**

I have the read the head teacher information letter describing the research into the nurture group curriculum that this school has been asked to participate and I have been given a copy to keep. The nature and aims of the research have been fully explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details of the research and ask any pertinent questions. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which the school and participants will be involved.

I understand that the school's involvement in this study and particular data from this research will remain strictly confidential and that only the researcher involved in the study will have sole access to the data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research has been completed.

I consent for the school to participate in the study. I understand that I have the right to withdraw at any time without the need to give a reason that will not disadvantage the school or any participants.

Head teacher's name:

Signature:

Date:

# **Appendix 3**

### **Appendix 3: Email to consenting head teachers**

Many thanks for consenting to be part of my doctoral research project; it is much appreciated. To begin the process of interviewing relevant pupils, parents and staff I would like to arrange a visit with relevant staff to plan this process. In addition, I hope to visit the nurture group prior to the interviews in the form of a 'pilot visit' to meet the children and any parents who may be available so I am not a complete stranger to them when they are interviewed. Also it will give all participants the opportunity to ask any questions that may address any concerns.

Please advise regarding suitable dates and times to contact the most appropriate member of staff.

Best wishes

John Kirk



# **Appendix 4**

## **Appendix 4: Information letter to parents/guardians requesting permission for their child to take part in the research project.**

Dear (Name of parent/guardian)

My name is John Kirk and I am doing some research into the curriculum activities provided by nurture groups such as *(name of nurture group)* that could help other nurture groups, other schools and importantly other pupils. *(Name of child)* has been chosen to take part in the research through a short interview in the *(name of nurture group)* room to chat about their experiences. I will also be talking to some parents and staff to find their views.

If you consent to *(name of child)* taking part in this research project please sign the enclosed form. If you agree, I will meet *(name of child)* before the interview to answer any questions they may have and make sure they are happy about taking part by getting their written permission too.

The interview should be fairly short (up to 20 minutes) and will be recorded. No one else will listen to the recording or read any notes I may make, as the interview is private and confidential. The only time I may need to speak to someone else would be if *(name of child)* told me something that meant someone was in danger. I hope this will be a positive and enjoyable experience but if *(name of child)* becomes upset in any way I will stop the interview and alert one of the nurture group staff.

It is the school policy for one of the nurture group staff to stay in the room when the interview takes place but they will not take any part in the interview.

If you have any questions or concerns I am happy to meet up with you before the interview. You can contact me on the details below but I will be visiting the *(name of nurture group)* on *(date)*.

When I have completed the research I will write a report. The names of the school and everyone who took part will not be mentioned, as no personal details will be included so everyone is anonymous. All recordings and notes will be kept in a safe place during the research and will be destroyed once the research has been completed.

Thank you,

John Kirk

Contact details:

# **Appendix 5**

## **Appendix 5: Consent form for parents/guardians to allow their child to take part in the research.**

I have read the information letter relating to the research into the nurture group curriculum in which (*name of child*) has been asked to take part in and have been given a copy to keep.

The aims of the research and my child's role have been explained to me and I have had the opportunity to meet the researcher to discuss the details and ask questions. I fully understand what is being proposed and how (*name of child*) will be involved.

I understand (*name of child*)'s involvement in this study and all recordings and notes from this research will be strictly confidential as only the researcher will have access to this information. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research project has been completed.

I fully consent to (*name of child*) taking part in the study that has been fully explained to me. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without disadvantage to the school, myself or my child and without being obliged to give any reason.

Child's name:

Parent/guardian's name:

Parent/guardian's signature:

Date:

# Appendix 6

## **Appendix 6: Pupil participant information sheet and consent form**

My name is John and I am trying to find out about the work you do in the (name of nurture group) so I hope you can help me by agreeing to meet me to answer some questions about the sort of things you do in (*name of nurture group*) and your classroom.

If you agree to take part I will meet you before the interview for you to ask any questions and for you to give your written permission to take part.

The interview will be recorded but no one else will listen to the recording or read my notes. What you say will be kept between us, as it is confidential. The only time that I would speak to someone else is if you tell me something that means that you or someone else is in danger. If you get upset about anything I will stop and ask Mrs (*name*) or Miss (*name*) to help. Mrs (*name*) or Miss (*name*) will be in the (*name of nurture group*) at the time but they will not be listening to what you say.

When the research is finished, I will write a report and not use your name or any personal information so no one will know what you said. I will keep your recording and notes in a safe place. When I have finished with the recording and notes they will be destroyed.

If you want to take part in this research tick ✓ the boxes if you agree. An adult can help you.

- ☐ I understand what the research is about and what I need to do.
- ☐ I understand that I can stop talking if I want to.
- ☐ I understand that I do not have to answer any questions if I do not want to.
- ☐ I understand that my answers will be recorded.
- ☐ I understand that what I say will be kept private and only shared after it has had my name and any other details that could identify me taken out. The only time that John can tell anybody else my name or any details, is if I say something which means that me or someone else is getting hurt.
- ☐ I understand that I can change my mind about taking part at any time. It will not affect the way I am supported.
- ☐ I agree to take part in the research project

Name of pupil:

Signature:

Date:

# Appendix 7



## Appendix 7: Parent participant information letter

Dear (Name of parent/guardian)

My name is John Kirk and I am doing some research into the curriculum activities provided by nurture groups that could help other groups, other schools and importantly other pupils. I am looking for parents to help by agreeing to be interviewed about their experiences of the curriculum activities in the (*name of nurture group*). I will also be talking to some pupils and staff to find their views.

I hope you will be able to take part in this research by signing the enclosed form to give your consent. The interview will take place in the (*name of nurture group*) and will be recorded. It should not last too long (around 30 minutes).

No one else will listen to the recording or read any notes I may make, as the interview is private and confidential. The only time I may need to speak to someone else would be if you told me something that meant someone was in danger. I hope this will be a positive and enjoyable experience but if at anytime you may be upset I will stop the interview.

If you have any questions or concerns I am happy to meet up with you before the interview. You can contact me on the details below but I will be visiting the (*name of nurture group*) on (*date*).

When I have completed the research I will write a report. The names of the school and everyone who took part will not be mentioned, as no personal details will be included so everyone remains anonymous. All recordings and notes will be kept in a safe place during the research and will be destroyed once the research has been completed.

Thank you,

John Kirk

Contact details:

# **Appendix 8**

## **Appendix 8: Parent/guardian participant consent form**

I have the read (and given a copy to keep) the parent / guardian participant information letter that informs me of my role as a participant in the research into the nurture group curriculum that this school has agreed to take part. I have been given the opportunity to discuss the details and ask and pertinent questions with the researcher.

I fully understand what is being proposed in this research project and that all data from this research will remain strictly confidential and only the researcher involved in the study will have access to the data. It has been explained to me what will happen to the data once the research has been completed.

I consent to participate in the study that has been fully explained to me

Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without disadvantage to myself, my child and the school and without being obliged to give any reason.

Name of parent/guardian:

Signature:

Date:

# Appendix 9

## Appendix 9: Staff participant Information Letter

Dear (Name of staff member)

My name is John Kirk and I am carrying out a research project into the curriculum activities provided by nurture groups that could help other groups, mainstream practitioners and importantly other pupils. I am looking for nurture group and mainstream staff to help by agreeing to be interviewed about their experiences of the curriculum activities in the (*name of nurture group*) and/or their mainstream classroom. I will also be talking to some pupils and parents to find their views.

In addition I hope to carry out some observations in the nurture groups and in mainstream classrooms that contain at least one nurture group pupil. I hope you will be able to volunteer and agree to these observations.

I hope you will be able to take part in this research by signing the enclosed form to give your consent. The interview will take place in the (*name of nurture group*) and will be recorded. It should not last too long (around 30 minutes). Once volunteers have been identified, the timetables for the observations will be agreed.

No one else will listen to the recording or read any notes I may make, as the interviews and observations are private and confidential. The only time I may need to speak to someone else would be if you told me something that meant someone was in danger. I hope this will be a positive and enjoyable experience but if at anytime you may be upset I will stop the interview.

If you have any questions or concerns I am happy to meet up with you before the interview. You can contact me on the details below but I will be visiting the (*name of nurture group*) on (*date*).

When I have completed the research I will write a report. The names of the school and everyone who took part will not be mentioned, as no personal details will be included so everyone remains anonymous. All recordings and notes will be kept in a safe place during the research and will be destroyed once the research has been completed.

Thank you,

John Kirk

Contact details:

# **Appendix 10**

## Appendix 10: Staff Participant consent form

I have the read (and given a copy to keep) the staff participant information letter that informs me of my role as a participant in the research into the nurture group curriculum that this school has agreed to take part. I have been given the opportunity to discuss the details and ask and pertinent questions with the researcher.

I fully understand what is being proposed in this research project and that all data from this research will remain strictly confidential and only the researcher involved in the study will have access to the data. It has been explained to me what will happen to the data once the research has been completed.

☐ I consent to be interviewed in the study that has been fully explained to me

☐ I consent to participate in a observation for the study that has been fully explained to me

Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw at any time without disadvantage and without being obliged to give any reason.

Name of staff member:

Signature:

Date:

# **Appendix 11**



## Appendix 11: Approval from the Open University ethics committee



The Open University

From Dr Duncan Banks  
Chair, The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee  
Email duncan.banks@open.ac.uk  
Extension 59198

To John Kirk, CREET

Subject *"An explanatory study of the curriculum in primary  
nuture groups: From a pupil, parent and practitioner  
perspective"*

Ref HREC/2014/1675/Kirk/1  
AMS ref n/a  
IRAS ID n/a  
Submitted 27 April 2014  
Date 28 April 2014

### Memorandum

This memorandum is to confirm that the research protocol for the above-named research project, as submitted for ethics review, has been given a **favourable opinion** by the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee. Please note that the OU research ethics review procedures are fully compliant with the majority of grant awarding bodies and their Frameworks for Research Ethics.

Please make sure that any question(s) relating to your application and approval are sent to [Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk](mailto:Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk) quoting the HREC reference number above. We will endeavour to respond as quickly as possible so that your research is not delayed in any way.

At the conclusion of your project, by the date that you stated in your application, the Committee would like to receive a summary report on the progress of this project, any ethical issues that have arisen and how they have been dealt with.

Regards,

Dr Duncan Banks  
Chair OU HREC

# **Appendix 12**

## **Appendix 12: Interview schedules**

### **Pupil schedule**

What do you enjoy best about school?

Are you enjoying being in the nurture group?

How often do you come to the group?

Can you tell me about the things you enjoy doing in the nurture group?

Is it different to what you do in your classroom?

Tell me about Circle time?

Tell me about the snack time

What do you like doing in your classroom?

What do you enjoy doing in your classroom?

What would you like to do more / less of?

Does everyone get on in the nurture group?

Do you miss being in your class? If so why?

(Supplementary questions will be asked based on the responses to the above questions)

### **Parent / guardian schedule**

How long has (name of child) been in the nurture group?

Tell me a bit about (name of child)?

Why do you think they went in the group?

How did you feel about it at the time?

How do you feel now?

Does (name of child) tell you about the things they do in the group?

Do you know the sort of activities/curriculum they do in the group?

Have you been to visit the group?

Have you met or chatted with the staff?

How well do you think (name of child) was getting on in school with learning and behaviour before starting the group?

Do you think (name of child) has changed after being in the group?

Have you noticed any difference in them at home?

(Supplementary questions will be asked based on the responses to the above questions)

## **Nurture group staff schedule**

How long has the group been running?

When does it run?

How did you plan the room?

Why was the group set up?

How do you decide who goes into the group?

How long do they stay in the group?

What do you want the children to learn in the group?

How do you go about planning the curriculum?

Which areas of the curriculum do you enjoy teaching?

Which bits of the curriculum do the children enjoy?

How do you plan your roles in the group?

How much freedom do you have in your planning?

Do you have breakfast and snack time?

Of all the things they have learned what have they taken back into the classroom?

How do you know when they are ready to go back into class full time?

How do parents react to their child being in the nurture group?

How do you keep in touch with parents?

Do you think parents have an understanding of nurture group practice?

Do you think parents know about the nurture group curriculum?

Are there any skills that children have learned in the group that they can take home?

How do mainstream staff respond to the group?

(Supplementary questions will be asked based on the responses to the above questions)

## **Mainstream staff schedule**

How long has (name of pupil) been attending the nurture group?

What is your experience of the nurture group in school?

When do the pupils in your class attend the nurture group?

How do keep in touch with the nurture group staff about curriculum planning?

Do you have any concerns about the curriculum areas they miss?

How long do pupils stay in the nurture group?

What sorts of activities do the nurture group pupils enjoy/find challenging in your class?

Have you noticed any changes in the pupils since they started the nurture group?

How do keep in touch with the nurture group staff about pupil progress?

How do you track pupil progress in your class?

Would you know if the progress was due to the nurture group?

(Supplementary questions will be asked based on the responses to the above questions

# **Appendix 13**

## **Appendix 13 – Example of transcription (Phase 1 of the six phases of Braun and Clarke’s thematic analysis (2006).**

### **Transcript of interview with nurture group staff NG5 and NG6**

**Interviewer: When does it run?**

**NG6:** Four afternoons a week

**NG5:** Not Fridays

**NG 6:** On Friday we plan for next week and meet with the class teachers

**Interviewer: Why the afternoons?**

**NG5:** It’s easier in the afternoon as we tried it in the morning and it didn’t work as well.

**NG6:** When we ran it in the morning there were problems with missing literacy and numeracy so we moved it to the afternoon.

**NG5:** Some class teachers complained they were missing the important stuff (*Pulls a face*). To keep the peace we set up our group in the afternoons as the class teachers complained they were missing the basics....literacy and numeracy. That’s easier for us as we cover science, art, design and technology and most of the rest. We also do a bit of literacy and numeracy to put it in a real life problem solving situation. We also give them bits of homework.

**Interviewer: What kind of homework?**

**NG5:** We give homework once a week. Usually it’s to do with sounds and letters to support the phonics work in Year 2. Parents are really interested and want to help but need a bit of support in knowing what to do. We are happy for them to pop in on homework night. We try to involve parents as they are dead keen.

**Interviewer: How do you involve the parents in the homework?**

**NG5:** We have held homework sessions for parents to explain what are trying to do. Also, we invite parents into the room to involve them so they can see what we are doing. We had a brilliant art day last week that was fun. Some parents are regular helpers so they can see what they can do.



**Interviewer: How did you plan the room?**

**NG5:** Just what the training recommended really.

**NG6:** It was a struggle to get things we wanted 'cos of the cost especially the kitchen so we had to wait for that so we just has a kettle, a toaster and a microwave.

**NG5:** We wanted to make it cosy so the first thing we got was a sofa. It was red and second hand from one of the teachers.

**NG6:** This is a new one from IKEA (*laughs*). The parents bought it...fund raising.and so were these cushions..

**NG5:** ...and the rug. We use this bit a lot for story and just to sit and chat.

**NG6:** I worked in Nursery before so some bits are from them. The dressing up stuff and the toys are from the charity shop. We try to link the play area to the topic so we might have a shop or a castle or a den ..

**NG5:** ..or an igloo (*giggles*)

**NG6:** We like it to be colourful and lively.

**Interviewer: Why was the group set up?**

**NG6:** We have a lot of very needy children who need extra help as they struggle in the classes.

**NG5:** I agree. This is a very needy group as they have lots of issues to address. But to be honest so have their parents as they are very needy too.

**NG6:** Because of the blocks or barriers created by low self-confidence and poor self-image many children find it difficult to learn, especially in a class. Nurture groups should take the child back through early stages of learning while building confidence and increasing self-esteem. Once a foundation in learning is established the child can then continue to learn in class enabling the mainstream teacher to escalate the process.

**Interviewer: That's really interesting. Tell me a bit more about these needy parents**

**NG5:** Some parents struggle to cope. Some come over as loud but I think it's just an act as underneath they have the same needs as the children as they lack confidence and don't really know how to tackle things so need lots of support and help.

**NG6:** We could have a parents' nurture group (*smiles*).

**NG5:** We try to help as much as we can and they pop in after the session. We have some regulars.

**Interviewer:** Are there any particular areas these needy children struggle with?

**NG5:** OMG loads (*laughs*). Let me think...some don't really get on with other children.....or adults come think about it and some are poor academically and are well behind in their class. We have a lot of boys in the group who look very macho on the surface but underneath are totally lacking in confidence with low self-esteem.

**NG6:** We think low-self esteem is a big problem in this area for children and lots of adults. They don't think they are very good at anything so we wonder if this is a reason why they bully others?

**NG5:** Many children have low self-confidence and poor self-image but so do many parents. It's hard to break the cycle. We hope we teach them to bounce back and be more resilient.

**NG6:** Some struggle with social skills such as taking turns and working with others in a group. So we try to build their confidence. It seems to be working. One boy in this group is making progress. At first he was very shy and didn't mingle much with the others. He wasn't very confident in playing the games and taking part in practical activities. He was a bit of a loner. But things improved. We noticed that after a few weeks in the group that he was more confident and as a result started to share more with others in the group and listened to them in Circle Time.

**NG5:** We encourage them to talk like in Circle Time. We build Circle Time into the timetable each day. It is important that we give everyone in the group a chance to listen and take turns. Usually it is after dinnertime as there have usually been issues to sort.

**Interviewer:** How do you decide who goes into the group?

**NG6:** We use the Boxall. It's good as it shows on paper our gut feeling. Then we do a short list.

**NG5:** Sometimes teachers aren't best happy but we choose the ones that will get on well together as it's no good having too many challenging loud aggressive boys, as it would be chaos.

**Interviewer: Why do you think some staff aren't best happy?**

**NG5:** Some just want certain children to go in the group, usually the ones that are kicking off in class. But we stick by the Boxall and decide on the group that will get on well together. It's no good if they fight all the time. Also we often have some loners who won't speak and struggle to make friends.

**Interviewer: Tell me a bit more about how you use the Boxall Profile**

**NG6:** Three of us complete it....us two and the class teacher. And we set targets for the IEP

**NG5:** Usually three targets starting with the easy ones. One is usually poor listening skills, so if they improve their listening skills they can hopefully understand what to do and improve their work.

**NG6:** The trouble is that most of this group have lots of issues such as low self-esteem and low levels of confidence and attachment issues so it's very challenging and you have to take it one step at a time, as it's not a quick fix.

**Interviewer: How long do they stay in the group?**

**NG5:** It depends...we try to re-integrate them to classes as soon as possible but at the most it is three terms.

**NG6:** Some go after one term but it's usually two or three

**Interviewer: What do you want children to learn in the nurture group?**

**NG6:** That's hard...I thought you said all the questions would be easy (*laughs*). We want them to learn what they need to learn. We plan the curriculum around needs and interests. So some like to play and others like to dress up and some like to write and others like to sit at the computer.

**NG5:** So what do we want them to learn? OK... We set targets from the Boxall. Mainly it's: learn to get on with others, be confident, feel better about themselves and go back to class with more confidence. But we do maths and phonics and reading so we hope they learn academic things too. We do a lot of chatting while we work and we have Circle Time every day. Children are encouraged to speak out so they begin to feel their contribution is welcomed.

**Interviewer: So how do you go about planning the nurture group curriculum?**

**NG5:** Oh. It's a bit like jigsaw. We start from the profile and then the targets and decide what we need to cover. It's usually based on the plans from the classes. We know we have to cover the National Curriculum so we blend all this together. It's a bit like a Jamie Oliver recipe (*laughs*). We try to make sure it's fun and they enjoy it. It's like I said before it's based on helping children feel better about themselves and being more confident and having a go. It doesn't matter to us if they fail but as many have failed so often we want them to succeed and be proud.

**NG6:** It's a challenge as we have some bright children who struggle to make friends and form relationships so the activity needs to be at their ability level with social skills built in.

**NG5:** We try to plan a range to suit all of them in the group. We do a lot in groups or pairs or sharing and playing games.

**Interviewer: Which areas of the curriculum do you enjoy teaching?**

**NG5:** The practical things are fun as we enjoy getting involved. So we do a lot of artwork and making things and doing things such as gardening (*thinks*) ...and making everything practical and interesting and fun.

**NG6:** When we plan the boring stuff ...we try to make it interesting so we enjoy it as well.

**NG5:** I enjoy watching them in the play corner. You learn a lot by listening in to their conversations.

**Interviewer: Tell me a bit more about the play corner and how children play**

**NG5:** Most of them are happy playing by themselves. The toys are popular and so is the dressing up.

**NG6:** We are doing the Romans so we have a Roman camp. They go and sit in it and read or talk to each other. Or have mock fights (*laughs*)

**NG 5:** Maybe not a good idea.....encouraging fights...but it's only play.

**Interviewer: Do you ever join in the play or just watch?**

**NG6:** Just watch really. It's planned as free time so it's one of the choices.

**Interviewer: How do you plan your roles in the group?**

**NG5:** We try to work together. We plan together so we both know what we are doing.

**NG6:** We plan the activities so our roles are clear but sometimes we need to change and respond.

**NG5:** We try to model things in the games we play and we act out things to show how to behave when taking turns and not sulking if you lose. If there is falling out we pretend we have fallen out to show them.

**NG6:** The training talked about scaffolding and how it could help us scaffold learning. I can remember it as it was Vygotsky as I did my assignment about him and ZPD..no ZPD..I'm not as daft as I look (*Laughs*)

NG5: You are (*shouts and laughs*)

**Interviewer: How much freedom do you have in the planning?**

**NG6:** Quite a bit really especially in the way we do things. We can be flexible.

**NG5:** It's important we have a routine and things are consistent so we try to stick to the timetable but we can change it if things aren't going to plan.

**Interviewer: How do you link to mainstream classrooms and the National Curriculum?**

**NG6:** It's a challenge. We meet with the teachers and they give us their planning for the term so we can link into the topic themes. So last term we all did the Romans.

**NG5:** We do it in a different way to liven it up. We know we must meet the National Curriculum requirements so plan those in but most of that is covered in the mornings in class. We met with the class teachers so we know what each of us is doing and the timetable is clear.

**Interviewer: Do you have breakfast and snack time?**

**NG5:** We don't have a breakfast club but if some arrive early we give them their breakfast. We have snack time every morning that helps to sit down and meet together and share getting on.

**NG6:** We try to share and give everyone a job such as giving out the juice, setting the table, giving out the food and clearing up. They seem to enjoy it.

**NG5:** Many don't sit at a table at home as it's a quick snack watching the telly.

**NG6:** We encourage them to say 'please' and 'thank you' as it helps with social skills.

**NG5:** I suppose we are teaching what some have missed at home.

**Interviewer:** **Of all the things you said they have learned, what do you think they have taken back into the classroom?**

**NG5:** It's hard to know really but after talking to the children and the teachers they have taken confidence back into the classroom and the ability to join in and have a go. They seem to enjoy school more so they will have a better chance to learn in the future. Turn taking and better listening are two things and dealing with situations in an appropriate manner instead of flying off the handle and having a razzie....as we call it. They are calmer. Many are more ready to learn and make a more positive contribution.

**Interviewer:** **So how do you know when they are ready to go into class by themselves full time?**

**NG6:** We ask them (*smiles*)...there is no point in us deciding, as we can't read their minds. They know when they are ready. We ask them. If they're not ready we stay a bit longer. I think children should return to class with a better understanding of consistency, clear routines and expectations. Children with trust issues return to class with a better understanding of the routine of the day but can also accept change. They have learned in a safe environment that they can trust that the adults mean what they say and that there are high expectations for good behaviour that will be rewarded.

**NG5:** When they feel they are a valued member of the group and part of a team, that is the time they need to start going back into class. We spend a lot of time supporting children when they go back into class. It's important, as some are quite frightened about going back.

**NG6:** Once we think they are ready we talk to them about how they feel about going back to class. Most are OK with it so we have a chat with their Mam or Dad....or Grandma to see how they feel about it. Then the child decides which lesson they would like to go back into. We make sure it is going to be successful. One of us goes

with them and supports them as needed ...just the way we would in the nurture group. We go in until they feel comfortable and confident and it's only then we think about starting to let them go in by themselves.

**Interviewer: How do parents react to their child being in a nurture group?**

**NG6:** Quite well really. Most are pleased the school is doing something, as many are worried about their child not making friends or being unhappy.

**Interviewer: How do you keep in touch with parents?**

**NG6:** We invite parents in at regular intervals through our monthly activity days for a cuppa and some pop in every so often for a chat. I think this pays dividends, as some are regular helpers now.

**NG5:** Those who are uncomfortable coming into school get used to the room and get used to meetings and school activities such as sports' days and bingo nights. They begin to feel valued and involved with their child's schooling. When they start to value education, the child's view on learning also changes. I think the parents are more confident too. Parents are invited to our coffee mornings and last week every parent came.

**Interviewer: Do you think there are any skills that children have learned in the nurture group that they can take home?**

**NG6:** Lots I hope.

**Interviewer: Can you think of any examples?**

**NG6:** Some parents are able to pick up parenting skills such as behaviour strategies by watching positive interaction in the group..with us as role models. It will help them to handle situations at home.

**NG5:** Some ask our advice if they are having a struggle but I think it's important everyone does the same thing so it's consistent. I know many parents are interested in the phonics homework as they help them. We did a little session after school last month to explain about the phonics and we didn't think many of our parents would come but we were surprised to be honest that nearly all of this group's parents came.

**NG6:** Maybe it was the free cakes (*laughs*).

**Interviewer:** That's it really. Many thanks for your time. Is there anything you want to ask me or add to what you said?

**NG6:** No not really. Thank you. I enjoyed it as it made me think about all we do. It's a hard job some days but we enjoy it.

**NG5:** Thank you



# **Appendix 14**

## Appendix 14 – Example of transcription (Phase 2 of the six phases of Braun and Clarke’s thematic analysis (2006).

### Transcript of interview with nurture group staff NG5 and NG6 with initial coding.

Speaker	Transcript	Coding
Interviewer	<b>How long has the (<i>name of group</i>) been running?</b>	
NG5	We were one the first groups in Cumbria to start a group after I trained in Cambridge so it’s ten or eleven years ago now. Seems like a lifetime ( <i>laughs</i> ) !	<i>Long established</i> <i>Experienced</i> <i>NGN trained</i>
Interviewer	<b>When does it run?</b>	
NG6	Four afternoons a week	<i>Part time group</i>
NG5	Not Fridays	
NG6	On Friday we plan for next week and meet with the class teachers	<i>Regular liaison with mainstream staff</i>
Interviewer	<b>Why the afternoons?</b>	
NG5	It’s easier in the afternoon as we tried it in the morning and it didn’t work as well.	<i>Flexible approach</i>
NG6	When we ran it in the morning there were problems with missing literacy and numeracy so we moved it to the afternoon.	<i>Conflict regarding curriculum coverage</i>
NG5	Some class teachers complained they were missing the important stuff ( <i>Pulls a face</i> ). To keep the peace we set up our group in the afternoons as the class teachers complained they were missing the basics....literacy and numeracy. That’s easier for us as we cover science, art, design and technology and most of the rest. We also do a bit of literacy and numeracy to put it in a real life problem solving situation. We also give them bits of	<i>Disagreement with mainstream staff</i>  <i>Key areas - literacy and numeracy</i>  <i>Covering the range of curriculum areas</i>  <i>NG curriculum based on real life situations</i>  <i>Homework</i>

	homework.	
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>What kinds of homework?</b>	
NG5	We give homework once a week. Usually it's to do with sounds and letters to support the phonics work in Year 2. Parents are really interested and want to help but need a bit of support in knowing what to do. We are happy for them to pop in on homework night. We try to involve parents as they are dead keen.	<i>Supporting Y2 curriculum – liaison</i>  <i>Parental interest in homework</i>  <i>Encouraging parental involvement</i>  <i>Parental enthusiasm</i>  <i>Flexible approach</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>How did you involve the parents in the homework?</b>	
NG5	We have held homework sessions for parents to explain what are trying to do. Also, we invite parents into the room to involve them so they can see what we are doing. We had a brilliant art day last week that was fun. Some parents are regular helpers so they can see what they can do.	<i>Parental involvement</i>  <i>Informing parents of NG practice</i>  <i>Parental support</i>  <i>Fun</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>How did you plan the room?</b>	
NG6	Just what the training recommended really	<i>NGN training</i>
NG5	It was a struggle to get things we wanted 'cos of the cost especially the kitchen so we had to wait for that so we just has a kettle, a toaster and a microwave.	<i>Environment -Cost implications</i>  <i>Environment - Kitchen area appears to be a priority</i>
NG6	We wanted to make it cosy so the first thing we got was a sofa. It was red and second hand from one of the teachers.	<i>Environment – comfortable</i>  <i>Support from mainstream staff</i>
NG5	This is a new one from IKEA ( <i>laughs</i> ). The parents bought it...fund raising..and so were these cushions..	<i>Support from parents</i>
NG6	...and the rug. We use this bit a lot for story and just to sit and chat.	<i>Environment - comfortable</i>
NG5	I worked in Nursery before so some bits are from them. The dressing up stuff and the toys	<i>Thematic approach</i>  <i>Dressing up clothes</i>

	are from the charity shop. We try to link the play area to the topic so we might have a shop or a castle or a den.	<i>and toys</i>
NG6	..or an igloo ( <i>giggles</i> )	
NG5	We like it to be colourful and lively.	<i>Warm welcoming environment important</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>Why was the group set up?</b>	
NG6	We have a lot of very needy children who need extra help as they struggle in the classes.	<i>Some pupils unable to cope in mainstream provision</i>
NG5	I agree. This is a very needy group as they have lot of issues to address. But to be honest so have their parents as they are very needy too.	<i>Parents need support – not clear what type of support</i>
NG6	<b>NG6:</b> Because of the blocks or barriers created by low self-confidence and poor self-image many children find it difficult to learn, especially in a class. Nurture groups should take the child back through early stages of learning while building confidence and increasing self-esteem. Once a foundation in learning is established the child can then continue to learn in class enabling the mainstream teacher to escalate the process.	<i>Barriers to learning in mainstream</i>  <i>Low self-esteem</i>  <i>Poor self-image</i>  <i>Learning based on developmental needs</i>  <i>Building confidence</i>  <i>Skills built in NG transferred to mainstream</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>That's really interesting. Tell me a bit more about these needy parents</b>	
NG5	Some parents struggle to cope. Some come over as loud but I think it's just an act as underneath they have the same needs as the children as they lack confidence and don't really know how to tackle things so need lots of support and help	<i>Parents struggling to cope</i>  <i>Parents have same needs as pupils</i>  <i>Parents lack confidence</i>  <i>Parents need support (parenting skills?)</i>
NG6	We could have a parents' nurture group	

	(smiles).	
NG5	We try to help as much as we can and they pop in after the session. We have some regulars.	<i>Drop in sessions for parents</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>Are there any particular areas these needy children struggle with?</b>	
NG5	OMG loads ( <i>laughs</i> ). Let me think...some don't really get on with other children.....or adults come think about it and some are poor academically and are well behind in their class. We have a lot of boys in the group who look very macho on the surface but underneath are totally lacking in confidence with low self-esteem.	<i>Poor peer relationships</i>  <i>Low academic achievement</i>  <i>Majority boys in group</i>  <i>Boys – veneer of macho self image</i>  <i>Lacking in confidence</i>
NG6	We think low-self esteem is a big problem in this area for children and lots of adults. They don't think they are very good at anything so we wonder if this is a reason why they bully others?	<i>Low self-esteem – pupils</i>  <i>Low self-esteem- parents</i>  <i>Possible link between low pupil self-esteem and high incidents of bullying</i>
NG5	Many children have low self-confidence and poor self-image but so do many parents. It's hard to break the cycle. We hope we teach them to bounce back and be more resilient.	<i>Low self-confidence – pupils and parents</i>  <i>Poor self-image – pupils and parents</i>  <i>Breaking down barriers</i>  <i>Teaching resilience</i>
NG6	Some struggle with social skills such as taking turns and working with others in a group. So we try to build their confidence. It seems to be working. One boy in this group is making progress. At first he was very shy and didn't mingle much with the others. He wasn't very confident in playing the games and taking part in practical activities. He was a bit of a loner. But things improved. We	<i>Poor social skills</i>  <i>Difficulty in turn taking</i>  <i>Difficulty in peer working</i>  <i>More confident</i>  <i>Started to share</i>  <i>Improved listening</i>

	noticed that after a few weeks in the group that he was more confident and as a result started to share more with others in the group and listened to them in Circle Time.	<i>skills</i>
NG5	We encourage them to talk like in Circle Time. We build Circle Time into the timetable each day. It is important that we give everyone in the group a chance to listen and take turns. Usually it is after dinnertime as there have usually been issues to sort.	<i>Regular sessions built into curriculum to encourage dialogue</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>How do you decide who goes into the group?</b>	
NG6	We use the Boxall. It's good as it shows on paper our gut feeling. Then we do a short list.	<i>Boxall Profile</i>
NG5	Sometimes teachers aren't best happy but we choose the ones that will get on well together as it's no good having too many challenging loud aggressive boys, as it would be chaos.	<i>Possible barrier – selection procedures re. mainstream staff</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>Why do you think some staff aren't best happy?</b>	
NG5	Some just want certain children to go in the group, usually the ones that are kicking off in class. But we stick by the Boxall and decide on the group that will get on well together. It's no good if they fight all the time. Also we often have some loners who won't speak and struggle to make friends.	<i>Balance of needs in group</i>  <i>Rely on Boxall Profile</i>  <i>Reluctant to talk</i>  <i>Difficulty in making friends</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>Tell me a bit more about how you use the Boxall Profile</b>	
NG6	Three of us complete it....us two and the class teacher. And we set targets for the IEP	<i>Boxall Profile completed by 3 adults</i>  <i>IEP targets set</i>
NG5	Usually three targets starting with the easy ones. One is usually poor listening skills, so if they improve their listening skills they can hopefully understand what to do and improve their work.	<i>Poor listening skills</i>

NG6	The trouble is that most of this group have lots of issues such as low self-esteem and low levels of confidence and attachment issues so it's very challenging and you have to take it one step at a time, as it's not a quick fix.	<i>Low self-esteem - pupils</i>  <i>Low levels of confidence – pupils</i>  <i>Attachment issues</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>How long do they stay in the group?</b>	
NG5	It depends...we try to re-integrate them to classes as soon as possible but at the most it is three terms.	<i>Re-integration</i>
NG6	Some go after one term but it's usually two or three	<i>Time in provision up to 3 terms</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>What do you want children to learn in the nurture group?</b>	
NG6	That's hard...I thought you said all the questions would be easy ( <i>laughs</i> ). We want them to learn what they need to learn. We plan the curriculum around needs and interests. So some like to play and others like to dress up and some like to write and others like to sit at the computer.	<i>Curriculum based on needs and interests</i>
NG5	So what do we want them to learn? OK... We set targets from the Boxall. Mainly it's: learn to get on with others, be confident, feel better about themselves and go back to class with more confidence. But we do maths and phonics and reading so we hope they learn academic things too. We do a lot of chatting while we work and we have Circle Time every day. Children are encouraged to speak out so they begin to feel their contribution is welcomed.	<i>Build relationships</i>  <i>Confidence</i>  <i>Feel better about themselves</i>  <i>Dialogue whilst working encouraged</i>  <i>Self expression</i>  <i>Contribution is valued</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>Interviewer: So how do you go about planning the nurture group curriculum?</b>	
NG5	Oh. It's a bit like jigsaw. We start from the profile and then the targets and decide what	<i>Planning based on the needs of the child</i>

	we need to cover. It's usually based on the plans from the classes. We know we have to cover the National Curriculum so we blend all this together. It's a bit like a Jamie Oliver recipe ( <i>laughs</i> ). We try to make sure it's fun and they enjoy it. It's like I said before it's based on helping children feel better about themselves and being more confident and having a go. It doesn't matter to us if they fail but as many have failed so often we want them to succeed and be proud.	<i>Statutory NC requirements met</i>  <i>Fun and enjoyable</i>  <i>Pupils feeling better about themselves</i>  <i>Encouraging pupil confidence</i>  <i>Encourage success</i>  <i>Pride in achievements</i>
NG6	It's a challenge as we have some bright children who struggle to make friends and form relationships so the activity needs to be at their ability level with social skills built in.	<i>Challenge of balancing academic level with social and emotional needs.</i>
NG5	We try to plan a range to suit all of them in the group. We do a lot in groups or pairs or sharing and playing games.	<i>Planned co-operative activities</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>Which areas of the curriculum do you enjoy teaching?</b>	
NG5	The practical things are fun as we enjoy getting involved. So we do a lot of artwork and making things and doing things such as gardening ( <i>thinks</i> ) ...and making everything practical and interesting and fun.	<i>Staff involvement in practical curriculum</i>  <i>Interesting and fun</i>
NG6	When we plan the boring stuff ...we try to make it interesting so we enjoy it as well.	<i>Interesting curriculum activities</i>  <i>Staff enjoyment</i>
NG5	I enjoy watching them in the play corner. You learn a lot by listening in to their conversations.	<i>Play corner observations</i>  <i>Value of listening to pupil dialogue</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>Interviewer: Tell me a bit more about the play corner and how children play</b>	
NG5	Most of them are happy playing by themselves. The toys are popular and so is the dressing up.	<i>Solitary play</i>  <i>Toys</i>  <i>Dressing up</i>
NG6	We are doing the Romans so we have a	<i>Thematic planning</i>



	Roman camp. They go and sit in it and read or talk to each other. Or have mock fights <i>(laughs)</i>	
NG5	Maybe not a good idea.....encouraging fights...but it's only play.	<i>Reflecting on curriculum</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>Do you ever join in the play or just watch?</b>	
NG6	Just watch really. It's planned as free time so it's one of the choices.	<i>Unstructured Play - Free time activity</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>How do you plan your roles in the group?</b>	
NG5	We try to work together. We plan together so we both know what we are doing.	<i>Plan together</i>
NG6	We plan the activities so our roles are clear but sometimes we need to change and respond.	<i>Flexibility</i>
NG5	We try to model things in the games we play and we act out things to show how to behave when taking turns and not sulking if you lose. If there is falling out we pretend we have fallen out to show them.	<i>Model social skills</i>
NG6	The training talked about scaffolding and how it could help us scaffold learning. I can remember it as it was Vygotsky as I did my assignment about him and ZDP..no ZPD..I'm not as daft as I look <i>(Laughs)</i>	<i>Training</i>  <i>Knowledgeable staff</i>
NG5	NG5: You are <i>(shouts and laughs)</i>	<i>Humour</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>How much freedom do you have in the planning?</b>	
NG6	Quite a bit really especially in the way we do things. We can be flexible.	<i>Flexible</i>  <i>Freedom in planning curriculum</i>
NG5	It's important we have a routine and things are consistent so we try to stick to the timetable but we can change it if things aren't going to plan.	<i>Routines</i>  <i>Consistency</i>  <i>Flexibility</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>How do you link to mainstream classrooms and the National Curriculum?</b>	
NG6	It's a challenge. We meet with the teachers and they give us their planning for the term so we can link into the topic themes. So last	<i>Linking to NC and mainstream is challenging</i>

	term we all did the Romans.	
NG5	We do it in a different way to liven it up. We know we must meet the National Curriculum requirements so plan those in but most of that is covered in the mornings in class. We met with the class teachers so we know what each of us is doing and the timetable is clear.	<i>Different approach to curriculum</i>  <i>Clear understanding of mainstream provision through regular liaison.</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>Do you have breakfast and snack time?</b>	
NG5	We don't have a breakfast club but if some arrive early we give them their breakfast. We have snack time every morning that helps to sit down and meet together and share getting on.	<i>Daily snack time</i>  <i>Opportunity to meet</i>
NG6	We try to share and give everyone a job such as giving out the juice, setting the table, giving out the food and clearing up. They seem to enjoy it.	<i>Enjoyable</i>  <i>Clear roles</i>  <i>Formal dining occasion</i>
NG5	Many don't sit at a table at home as it's a quick snack watching the telly.	<i>Some don't have the opportunity at home</i>
NG6	We encourage them to say 'please' and 'thank you' as it helps with social skills.	<i>Developing social skills</i>
NG5	I suppose we are teaching what some have missed at home.	<i>Teaching social skills</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>Of all the things you said they have learned, what do you think they have taken back into the classroom?</b>	
NG5	It's hard to know really but after talking to the children and the teachers they have taken confidence back into the classroom and the ability to join in and have a go. They seem to enjoy school more so they will have a better chance to learn in the future. Turn taking and better listening are two things and dealing with situations in an appropriate manner instead of	<i>Confidence</i>  <i>Join in</i>  <i>Have a go</i>  <i>Enjoy school more</i>  <i>Coping strategies – anger management</i>  <i>Improved listening and social skills</i>

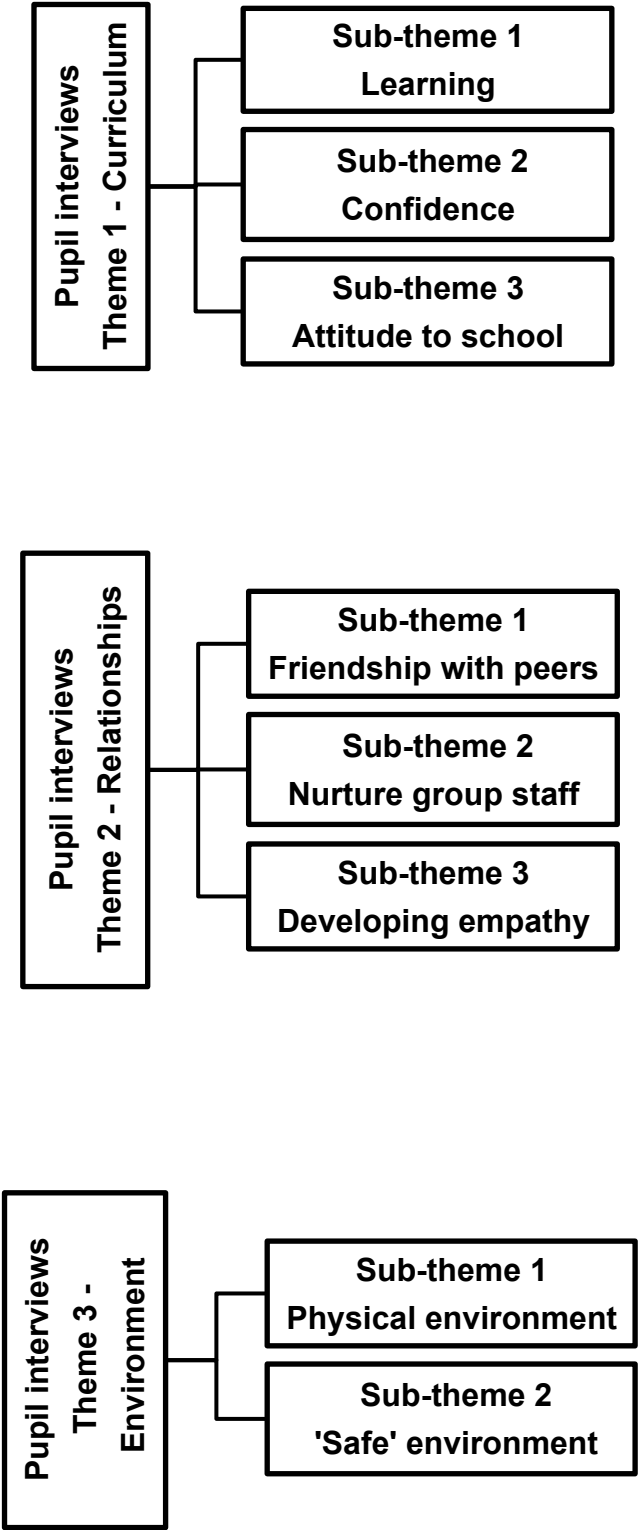
	<p>flying off the handle and having a razzzy....as we call it. They are calmer. Many are more ready to learn and make a more positive contribution.</p>	<p><i>Calmer</i></p> <p><i>Ready to learn</i></p> <p><i>Positive contribution</i></p>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>So how do you know when they are ready to go into class by themselves full time?</b>	
NG6	<p>We ask them (<i>smiles</i>)...there is no point in us deciding, as we can't read their minds. They know when they are ready. We ask them. If they're not ready we stay a bit longer. I think children should return to class with a better understanding of consistency, clear routines and expectations. Children with trust issues return to class with a better understanding of the routine of the day but can also accept change. They have learned in a safe environment that they can trust that the adults mean what they say and that there are high expectations for good behaviour that will be rewarded.</p>	<p><i>Pupil voice</i></p> <p><i>Importance of:</i></p> <p><i>Consistency</i></p> <p><i>Clear routines</i></p> <p><i>High Expectations</i></p> <p><i>Safe environment</i></p> <p><i>Trust adults</i></p> <p><i>High expectations</i></p> <p><i>Rewards</i></p>
NG5	<p>When they feel they are a valued member of the group and part of a team, that is the time they need to start going back into class. We spend a lot of time supporting children when they go back into class. It's important, as some are quite frightened about going back.</p>	<p><i>Valued member of group</i></p> <p><i>Mainstream support post transition</i></p> <p><i>Pupils-concerns re. return to mainstream</i></p>
NG6	<p>Once we think they are ready we talk to them about how they feel about going back to class. Most are OK with it so we have a chat with their Mam or Dad....or Grandma to see how they feel about it. Then the child decides which lesson they would like to go back into. We make sure it is going to be successful. One of us goes with them and supports them as needed ...just the way we would in the nurture group. We go in until they feel</p>	<p><i>Pupil voice</i></p> <p><i>Consultation with parents</i></p> <p><i>Support following transition</i></p> <p><i>Comfortable</i></p> <p><i>Confident</i></p>

	comfortable and confident and its only then we think about starting to let them go in by themselves.	
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>How do parents react to their child being in a nurture group?</b>	
<b>NG6</b>	Quite well really. Most are pleased the school is doing something, as many are worried about their child not making friends or being unhappy.	<i>Positive response from parents based in child's needs</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>How do you keep in touch with parents?</b>	
<b>NG6</b>	We invite parents in at regular intervals through our monthly activity days for a cuppa and some pop in every so often for a chat. I think this pays dividends, as some are regular helpers now.	<i>Regular contact with parents</i>  <i>Invited to school events</i>  <i>Parental empowerment</i>
<b>NG5</b>	Those who are uncomfortable coming into school get used to the room and get used to meetings and school activities such as sports' days and bingo nights. They begin to feel valued and involved with their child's schooling. When they start to value education, the child's view on learning also changes. I think the parents are more confident too. Parents are invited to our coffee mornings and last week every parent came.	<i>Encouraging parents to be comfortable</i>  <i>Parents valued and involved</i>  <i>Parental viewpoint influences pupils' attitude to education</i>  <i>Parental confidence</i>  <i>High response to parental invitations</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>Do you think there are any skills that children have learned in the nurture group that they can take home?</b>	
<b>NG6</b>	Lots I hope.	
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>Can you think of any examples?</b>	
<b>NG6</b>	Some parents are able to pick up parenting skills such as behaviour strategies by watching positive interaction in the	<i>Parenting skills transferable from NG – behaviour management</i>

	group..with us as role models. It will help them to handle situations at home.	<i>Role models</i>
NG5	Maybe it was the free cakes ( <i>laughs</i> ).	<i>Humour</i>
<b>Interviewer</b>	<b>That's it really. Many thanks for your time. Is there anything you want to ask me or add to what you said?</b>	
NG6	No not really. Thank you. I enjoyed it as it made me think about all we do. It's a hard job some days but we enjoy it.	
NG5	Thank you	

# **Appendix 15**

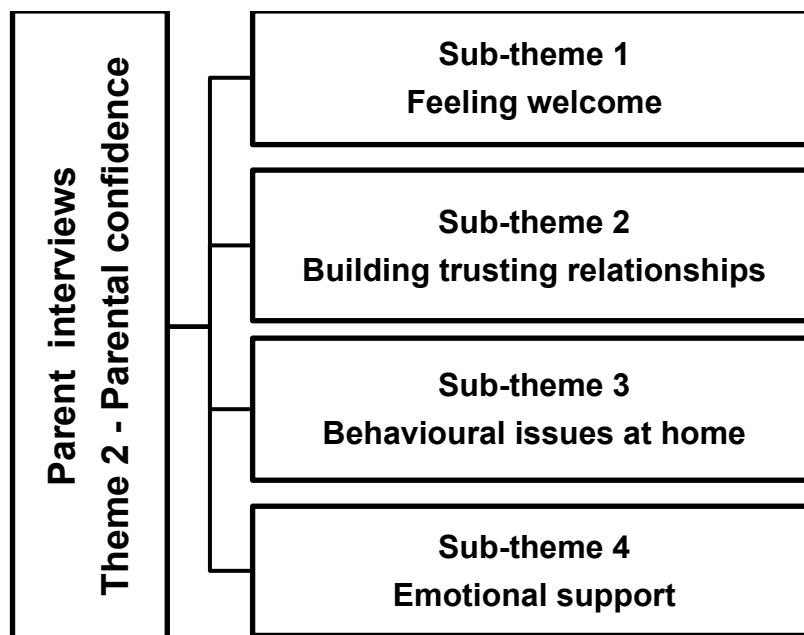
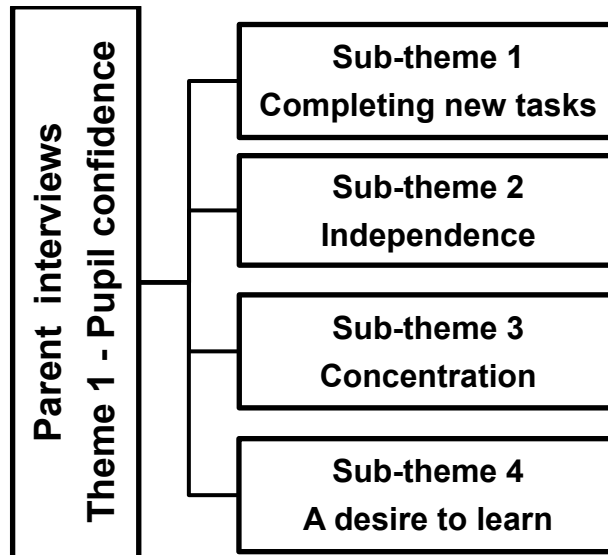
**Appendix 15 - Code map - Pupil interviews**



# **Appendix 16**

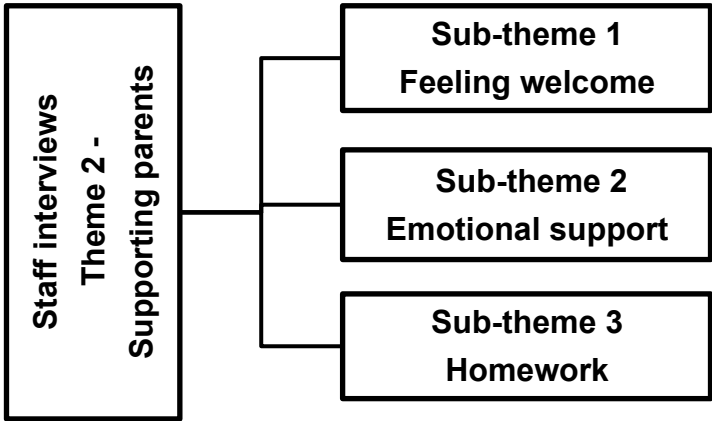
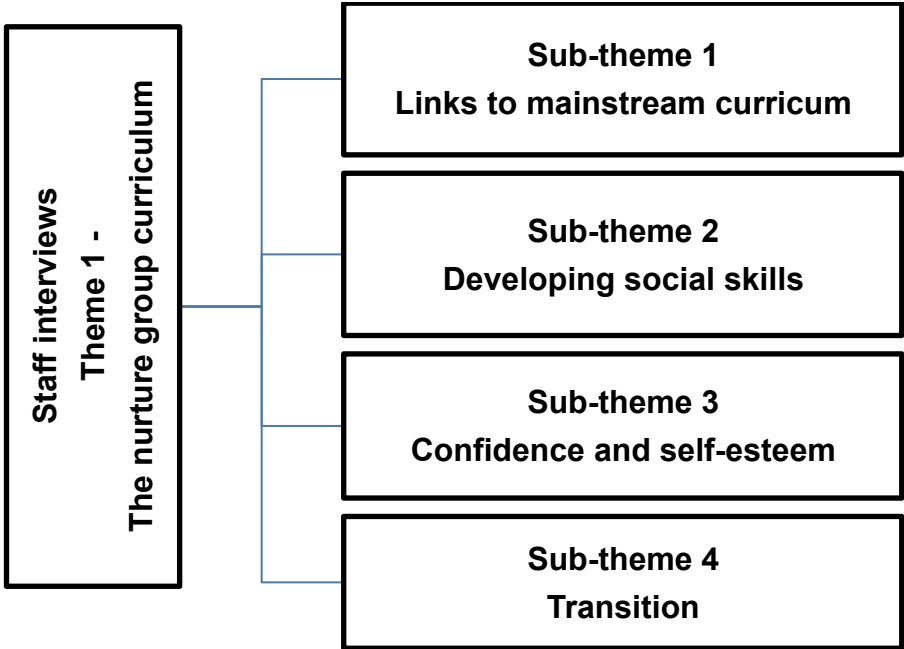


## Appendix 16 – Code map – Parent interviews



# **Appendix 17**

**Appendix 17 Code map – Staff interviews**



# **Appendix 18**

**Appendix 18 – Code map - Observations**

